

MRS. BRADLEY SERIES

*The*  
CROAKING  
RAVEN



GLADYS  
MITCHELL

# THE CROAKING RAVEN

## **Titles by Gladys Mitchell**

*Speedy Death* (1929)  
*The Mystery of a Butcher's Shop* (1929)  
*The Longer Bodies* (1930)  
*The Saltmarsh Murders* (1932)  
*Death at the Opera* (1934)  
*The Devil at Saxon Wall* (1935)  
*Dead Men's Morris* (1936)  
*Come Away, Death* (1937)  
*St. Peter's Finger* (1938)  
*Printer's Error* (1939)  
*Brazen Tongue* (1940)  
*Hangman's Curfew* (1941)  
*When Last I Died* (1941)  
*Laurels Are Poison* (1942)  
*Sunset Over Soho* (1943)  
*The Worst Viper* (1943)  
*My Father Sleeps* (1944)  
*The Rising of the Moon* (1945)  
*Here Comes a Chopper* (1946)  
*Death and the Maiden* (1947)  
*The Dancing Druids* (1948)  
*Tom Brown's Body* (1949)  
*Groaning Spinney* (1950)  
*The Devil's Elbow* (1951)  
*The Echoing Strangers* (1952)  
*Merlin's Furlong* (1953)  
*Faintley Speaking* (1954)  
*On Your Marks* (1954)

*Watson's Choice* (1955)  
*Twelve Horses and the Hangman's Noose* (1956)  
*The Twenty-Third Man* (1957)  
*Spotted Hemlock* (1958)  
*The Man Who Grew Tomatoes* (1959)  
*Say It with Flowers* (1960)  
*The Nodding Canaries* (1961)  
*My Bones Will Keep* (1962)  
*Adders on the Heath* (1963)  
*Death of a Delft Blue* (1964)  
*Pageant of Murder* (1965)  
*The Croaking Raven* (1966)  
*Skeleton Island* (1967)  
*Three Quick and Five Dead* (1968)  
*Dance to Your Daddy* (1969)  
*Gory Dew* (1970)  
*Lament for Leto* (1971)  
*A Hearse on May-Day* (1972)  
*The Murder of Busy Lizzie* (1973)  
*A Javelin for Jonah* (1974)  
*Winking at the Brim* (1974)  
*Convent on Styx* (1975)  
*Late, Late in the Evening* (1976)  
*Noonday and Night* (1977)  
*Fault in the Structure* (1977)  
*Wraiths and Changelings* (1978)  
*Mingled with Venom* (1978)  
*Nest of Vipers* (1979)  
*The Mudflats of the Dead* (1979)  
*Uncoffin'd Clay* (1980)  
*The Whispering Knights* (1980)  
*The Death-Cap Dancers* (1981)  
*Lovers, Make Moan* (1981)  
*Here Lies Gloria Mundy* (1982)  
*Death of a Burrowing Mole* (1982)  
*The Greenstone Griffins* (1983)

*Cold, Lone and Still* (1983)  
*No Winding Sheet* (1984)  
*The Crozier Pharaohs* (1984)

# **Gladys Mitchell writing as Malcolm Torrie**

*Heavy as Lead* (1966)

*Late and Cold* (1967)

*Your Secret Friend* (1968)

*Shades of Darkness* (1970)

*Bismarck Herrings* (1971)



# THE CROAKING RAVEN

GLADYS MITCHELL

 THOMAS & MERCER



This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Text copyright © The Executors of the Estate of Gladys Mitchell 1966  
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher.

Published by Thomas & Mercer Seattle 2014  
[www.apub.com](http://www.apub.com)

First published Great Britain in 1966 by Michael Joseph  
Amazon, the Amazon logo, and Thomas & Mercer are  
trademarks of [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com), Inc., or its affiliates.

E-ISBN: 9781477869093

## A Note about this E-Book

The text of this book has been preserved from the original British edition and includes British vocabulary, grammar, style, and punctuation, some of which may differ from modern publishing practices. Every care has been taken to preserve the author's tone and meaning, with only minimal changes to punctuation and wording to ensure a fluent experience for modern readers.

“Like the sad-presaging raven that tolls  
The sick man’s passport in her hollow beak,  
And, in the shadow of the silent night,  
Does shake contagion from her sable wing.”

MARLOWE *The Jew of Malta*

“The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements.”

SHAKESPEARE *Macbeth*

“At once his eyesight came to him again, and he saw by the  
light of the moon and the stars that he was beneath the  
gallows-tree...”

THE BROTHERS GRIMM *The Crows and the Soldier*

To Jeremy, Michael, and Julie Willson

“It so fell out at this hunting,  
Upon a simmer’s day,  
That they came by a fair castell  
Stood on a sunny brae.”

FAUSE FOODRAGE

# Contents

[CHAPTER ONE: Hamish Chooses a Birthday Present](#)  
[CHAPTER TWO: An Introduction to a Castle](#)  
[CHAPTER THREE: Open to Inspection](#)  
[CHAPTER FOUR: The Boatmen](#)  
[CHAPTER FIVE: Childe Roland](#)  
[CHAPTER SIX: Guests at the Chalet Dysey.](#)  
[CHAPTER SEVEN: Internal Evidence](#)  
[CHAPTER EIGHT: The Gardener Talks](#)  
[CHAPTER NINE: Alas, poor Yorick!](#)  
[CHAPTER TEN: The Dysey Inheritance](#)  
[CHAPTER ELEVEN: The Return of Mrs. Dysey.](#)  
[CHAPTER TWELVE: The Vicar and I Were There](#)  
[CHAPTER THIRTEEN: A Cleric's Evidence](#)  
[CHAPTER FOURTEEN: The Doctor's Story.](#)  
[CHAPTER FIFTEEN: The Foolish Virgin](#)  
[CHAPTER SIXTEEN: The Ravens' Hoard](#)  
[CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: Cyril Departs in Haste](#)  
[CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: And Returns at Leisure](#)  
[CHAPTER NINETEEN: E. and O. E.](#)  
[CHAPTER TWENTY: News of the Heir Apparent](#)  
[CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: The Vicar Ignores His Cloth](#)  
[CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: The Ravens' Nest](#)  
[CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: Retreat from Castle Perilous](#)  
[About the Author](#)

# CHAPTER ONE

## Hamish Chooses a Birthday Present

“And see ye not yon bonny road  
That winds about the ferny brae?  
That is the road to fair Elfland,  
Where thou and I this night maun gae.”

*Thomas the Rhymer*

Ever since he had been old enough both to know what he wanted and to understand whether or not he was likely to get it (not the same thing, by any means), Laura Gavin's son Hamish had been encouraged by his parents and his godmother to choose his own presents. From a pedal car, a fairy cycle, a small light football, a weight-for-age cricket bat, he had graduated to the possession of frog-flippers, a pedal-cycle important enough to be called a “real bike,” roller skates, and a model yacht. Later, at his urgent request, he had been given a pram-dinghy, a telescope, a fishing rod, and a pony. His tenth birthday was approaching.

“I suppose,” he suggested one morning during his Easter holiday from his preparatory school, “you wouldn't like to ask me something?”

“Yes. Have you cleaned your teeth?” replied his mother.

“No, not this morning, but I've eaten an apple. It comes to the same thing.”

“Have you groomed Pegasus?” asked his father.

“No. George said he'd do it for once.” He looked expectantly at the third adult member of the gathering. “*You*

can do better than that, Mrs. Dame, dear, can't you?"

Dame Beatrice Adela Lestrangle Bradley, the godmother aforesaid and, incidentally, his mother's employer, cackled. She sketched a gesture with a hand like a yellow claw.

"Well," she said, "you had the pony for Christmas and it is now your Easter vacation. Should I be right in guessing that you will soon be at home again for half-term?"

"You're very hot," said Hamish joyfully. "I'm *sure* you know what I mean!"

"Oh, *that!*" exclaimed his mother, suddenly enlightened.

"No!" said Hamish loudly. "You've had your guess. Let Mrs. Dame have hers. Do go on, Mrs. Dame, dear!"

"Is it possible that some thought of a birthday present is in the air?"

"I *knew* you'd guess right! Some people," he added, turning to his father, "have an instinct and some people haven't."

"How right you are," agreed Detective Chief-Superintendent Robert Gavin of the C.I.D. "Well, slip us the bad news gently. What's it to be?"

"Well, you generally give me separate things," said Hamish. There was a pause. His mother and father looked apprehensive. "*This* time," Hamish continued, "I expect you'll have to club together."

"What are we buying you? A motor-bike?" demanded Laura.

"Not yet. I'm not old enough to own one. This thing I've thought of isn't in the least dangerous. I mean, I'm sure it's a thing you'd *love* to give me if you thought you could afford it. And, of course, I'd give up my pocket-money, and all that sort of thing."

"You're reducing me to a nervous wreck," said Gavin. "Do put us out of our misery."

"Well, I wondered..."

"Get on with it!" said Laura.

"You see, I saw an advertisement."

"Well, that's not unusual."

"This one was. It was—oh, well, I'd better tell you. All hold your breaths and count ten...Right? Well, I don't want this present on my birthday itself. I don't want it—or anything else—until the summer holidays, so that will give you plenty of time to save up."

Laura groaned. Gavin whistled. Dame Beatrice cackled and asked,

"What is it? A cruise round the world?"

"No. I want them to rent a castle for me. Oh, only for a month, you know, because, of course, I'm going with the school to Denmark for part of the time. Look, I'll get the advertisement and show you. I've got it upstairs."

He dived over an occasional table, turning a neat somersault in so doing, and ran out of the room. His elders looked at one another, but, before any of them could make a remark, Hamish came clattering in again, waving a magazine. He rushed up to his mother and, dropping on his knees beside her chair, he spread out the magazine on her lap. Among the advertisements offering holiday accommodation, one was heavily marked in red.

"That's where *we* shall be, if we back this scheme, I suppose," commented Laura.

"Where, mamma?"

"In the red." But she studied the paragraph closely before she passed the magazine to her husband. Gavin scanned the advertisement and handed on the magazine to Dame Beatrice.

"They want a three months' let," he said. "No good to us at all."

Hamish's face fell.

"Surely they wouldn't stick to that, if people like *us* would take it for a month," he said. "Couldn't we go and see them and—well, *ask*?"



"You'd only be the more disappointed at being turned down, old man," said Gavin, sympathetically.

Hamish took the magazine dispiritedly from Dame Beatrice and went out of the room whistling. She glanced at the disappointed slant of his shoulders.

"We must take him to see it," she said. "I know something of these people. The man used to be a patient of mine. He was a bomber pilot during the war and was shot down over Germany. He was caught twice while trying to escape, and was badly wounded the second time. He was given solitary confinement before he was fit to leave hospital. He was in a sad state by the time he was released. He was sent to me under a general rehabilitation scheme sponsored by the Government. I have never been to the castle, but I used to talk with him about it. It gave us a starting point for his treatment."

"Well, *you're* the authority, of course," said Gavin, "but I should have thought it the worst thing in the world for Hamish to see the castle, as we can't rent it. There's no doubt his heart was set on it."

"Who said we couldn't rent it?" Dame Beatrice asked in mild tones.

"You mean that, as you know these people, they might let us have it for only a month? I shouldn't think they could afford to, you know."

"There is no reason why they should afford to, dear Robert. I shall rent it for three months, and then, if we like it, Laura and I will stay on after Hamish goes back to school. We can live there just as easily, for a few weeks, as we can in Hampshire, and the castle is not a prohibitive number of miles from my London clinic, so there will be no difficulties at all. Please summon Hamish and inform him that we will go and look at the place, but that he must not be disappointed if someone has acquired the lease before we get there."

“Well, really!” exclaimed Laura. “I’ve always said you spoil Hamish, but this is the limit!”

“Oh, Hamish isn’t the only one among us who wants to find out what it’s like to live in a castle. I was watching you as you read the advertisement, and I decided that, for once, mother and son saw eye to eye with one another,” retorted Dame Beatrice, cackling.

## CHAPTER TWO

### An Introduction to a Castle

“There’s a castle bigg’d wi’ lime and stane;  
O gif it stands not pleasantlie!  
In the forefront o’ that castle fair,  
Twa unicorns are bra’ to see;  
There’s the picture of a knight and a lady  
    bright,  
And the green hollin abune their bree.”

*The Outlaw Murray*

The castle certainly was built of lime and stone, and Gavin pulled up about twenty yards from the entrance so that the party could take a look at it before committing themselves further. It stood in a delightful setting of low hills and tall trees. There was no moat, but a curtain wall with six strong flanking towers protected a small Tudor house and the scowling Norman keep which rose behind it. There were no unicorns to be seen, for the coat-of-arms above the gatehouse archway showed three ravens and the motto *Salve Domina*.

The car drove in through the open gatehouse entrance and pulled up on the paved half of a large courtyard, the other half of which displayed a finely-trimmed lawn surrounded by flower-beds.

“Rather an odd sort of motto, didn’t you think?” asked Laura, as the car drew up on the paved area in front of the house.

“Well, odd or not,” Dame Beatrice replied, “there is much to be said for a motto which indicates neither militant nor mercenary sentiments.”

Hamish, from his seat in the front beside George, the chauffeur, wrenched open the door of the car and leapt out. George went to the rear door and opened it for Dame Beatrice. Laura followed her out and Gavin opened the door on his side and joined his son. Hamish was gazing rapturously at curtain walls and flanking towers. These seemed at odds with the small Tudor house, but this blended, although somewhat haphazardly, with the grey stone of the gatehouse.

“Delightful,” remarked Dame Beatrice, as they walked towards the main door of the house. “Everything appears to be in a remarkably good state of repair. I do hope we are in time.”

“They sounded quite cordial on the ‘phone,” said Laura. “It was a woman’s voice.” She rang the bell. The door was opened by a grey-haired woman in a badly-hung skirt and a cardigan which had seen better days. She smiled, but her eyes were like grey glass.

“Oh, do come in,” she said. “I’m Mrs. Dysey. You will be Dame Beatrice and party. I’m so sorry my husband isn’t here to meet you, but I can tell you all you want to know. Let’s talk in here, shall we?” She opened a door into a shabby but habitable room. “Please do sit down.” There were only three chairs, so Gavin and Hamish remained standing. “Well, now,” went on Mrs. Dysey, taking the third chair after raising her eyebrows at Gavin, who smiled and shook his head, “what would you like to know first?”

“They’d like to know the price,” said Hamish. “You didn’t put it in the advertisement.”

“We thought it might put people off before they’d even seen the place, young man.”

It was a tart reply. It was clear that Mrs. Dysey did not approve either of the comment or the commentator.

"I beg your pardon," said Hamish, aware of and sensitive to the rebuke, "but, you see, it's really for me they want to come here. It's to be my birthday present."

"Oh, I see," said Mrs. Dysey, mollified by this explanation. "Well,"—she addressed herself to Gavin, the only adult male among the party—"we'd like three hundred and fifty pounds in advance, and this would include use of linen, plate and cutlery, laundry service, servants' wages, and any produce from the kitchen garden and the home farm. We don't mind which three months you choose, provided that they run consecutively and that you let us know at least one month beforehand when you would like to come."

"If we take it, we should want it for August, September, and October," said Dame Beatrice.

"Well, you'd like to look over it, I expect. Oh, there *is* one other thing. I hope you won't find it an obstacle, but there's a clause in the lease to say that the place must be thrown open to the public on two afternoons a week, Wednesdays and Saturdays. There's nothing about a charge for admission, but you had better make one, all the same. People don't value things they are given for nothing, and, also, it keeps out the louts and their girl-friends. Well, if you'd like to come this way..."

"I suppose," said Hamish, prepared for another rebuff, "I mean, I'm not terribly interested in houses, so do you think I could go and look at the towers and the more castle-y bits in the courtyard?"

"That's up to your parents. If you do, be very careful of the newel staircases. They are very narrow and steep. And don't lean over the battlements, little boy."

"I'll go with him," said Gavin. "My wife and Dame Beatrice can see the house just as well without me." Already he shared his son's slight dislike of the châtelaine.

“Well, I think we were wise not to commit ourselves until we’ve had time to think it over,” said Gavin, when they were in the car and on their way back to London. “The chief snag, as I see it, is this being compelled to open the place every Wednesday and Saturday to the public. I think we might find that a real nuisance, you know.”

“It’s not as bad as you’d think,” said Laura. “The public are only shown three rooms in the house itself—the hall, the dining-room, and the state bedroom. After that, visitors are let loose to climb the flanking towers and look at the keep and the gatehouse. Somebody has to keep an eye on them in the house itself, of course, but we could take it in turns to be on duty. There’s no need for us all to be involved with them every time, is there?”

Gavin laughed.

“Talk about special pleading!” he said. “Well, the casting vote is with Dame Beatrice, because I know what Hamish thinks.”

“I thought it was just what I wanted,” said Hamish wistfully. “You see, you can all be perfectly comfortable sleeping in the house, and I could be on the top of one of the towers with your field-glasses. I could try each tower in turn and see which I liked best. I suppose, when I’d decided, I couldn’t have it for my very own, could I? You know, tell the visitors they couldn’t use it?”

“I don’t see why not—that is, if we take the place,” said Dame Beatrice. “A large, intimidating notice marked *Private*, together with a stout barrier, should convince the public that this particular amenity is not to be theirs. I see no reason why we lessees should pamper them. They would probably not wish to climb *all* the towers, anyway.”

“They can’t. Only two have staircases,” Hamish pointed out.

“So I’m in a minority of one,” said Gavin. “We don’t seem to have discussed the matter very much. I thought we were to put forward the pros and cons.”

"Do you really think we ought not to take it on, then?" asked Laura, who, although sometimes she derided it to his face, secretly had considerable faith in her husband's judgment.

"No, no," said Gavin, "I don't exactly mean that."

"Then what are you beefing about?"

"I didn't take to Mrs. Dysey over-much. Apart from that, the price is too low!"

"*What?* Three hundred and fifty pounds for three months! I should have thought two hundred and forty was ample. After all, that's twenty pounds a week."

"Less than twenty pounds a week. People ought to be paying forty for a place like that, especially with all those things thrown in. Did you manage to find out how many servants they keep? I didn't see anyone except a gardener."

"There are a cook, a housemaid, a parlour maid, and a kitchen maid."

"Did you see them?"

"No, but we heard their transistor set."

"Not sufficient proof that they exist—and, if they're there, why did Mrs. Dysey open the door to us herself?"

"Oh, you've got a policeman's mind!" exclaimed Laura, irritated. "I still think it's too dear."

"Well, just remember, Madam Shylock, that we're allowed to keep the half-crowns the public pay to be shown the place. I don't know how many may come, but..."

"We could make attractions," said Hamish, hopefully. "Parachute jumps from the tops of the towers! Helter-skelter—or whatever it is—on mats down the newel staircases! Archery contests in the courtyard! Timed races up to the top of the gatehouse and back! Sixpence extra to go into the keep."

"Nigger-minstrel troupe in the kitchen garden," said Gavin, grinning. "Well, the thing appears to be settled, except for Dame B., who, after all, is the person most to be considered."

Hamish, from the front seat, turned his head and gazed imploringly at his ally.

"Well," said Dame Beatrice, "I am of divided opinion. In other words, I can see the point of view of both sides."

"And, off the record?" asked Gavin, who knew his Dame Beatrice even better than Laura did.

"Off the record, I am inclined to favour your own opinion. On the other hand"...she met the hopeful eyes of the child..."a legal agreement should protect us against being exploited, defrauded or oppressed."

"So you think we go ahead and book this place?"

"Subject to the aforesaid legal agreement, yes, I do."

"You don't think it odd that the owner had a sudden call to London on the very day that we were due to be shown over the house, I suppose? I know I speak from a prejudiced point of view, but, over business matters, I'd always much rather deal with a man than with a woman."

"Yes, we're too clever for you," said Laura.

"That's an outmoded point of view, mamma," said Hamish, turning round again in the front seat to fix an earnest gaze upon her. "It is understood nowadays that the sexes are complementary, not antagonistic. That's what old Earthworm is always telling us in biology lessons."

"Referring to Mr. Dysey, late Bomber Command, Royal Air Force," said Dame Beatrice, "I very much doubt whether he was really called to London. He was avoiding *me*, I fancy."

"But you put back into him whatever it was that used to make him tick," objected Laura.

"Oh, he contributed his quota to the treatment. A courageous and most co-operative man. But, as all alienists, sociologists, and psychiatric workers will tell you, there can be a last-ditch feeling of revulsion towards them. In other words, the more successful the treatment, the less the patient ever wants to look upon a helping hand again. It is a perfectly natural reaction, and we accept it as such."



“Well, it seems to me damned ungrateful,” said Laura, “and a very wrong-headed point of view.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Gavin. “I can understand it, I think. People do hate having to feel grateful. It’s a well-known fact. It puts them in an inferior position, and nobody except a complete masochist likes that.”

“I don’t believe in masochists, complete or otherwise,” said Laura. “They know they can’t be top dogs, that’s all there is to it, so they make the best of the situation. It’s a form of sublimation, if you ask me.”

Dame Beatrice did not comment on this theory. Hamish said, turning to his father,

“Will you be able to be with us the whole month before I go to Denmark?”

“I doubt it very much,” said Gavin, “but I’ll fix a week or two of my leave for some time in August, and then we’ll hope for the best.”

“What did you think of the house? That was rather a dim sort of room we went into, wasn’t it?” suggested the child.

“The rest of the house is better,” said Dame Beatrice, “and your dear mother took the precaution of prodding the beds.”

“I shall have to sleep on a camp bed, I suppose, on the top of my tower.”

“While I don’t want to blight your life,” said Gavin, “I’m afraid you’ll have to lose this idea of sleeping on top of a tower. We shouldn’t have an easy moment.”

“No,” said Hamish thoughtfully, “I suppose you wouldn’t. Those newel staircases were pretty tricky, I thought, and, besides, come to think of it, if one of the towers was private the visitors wouldn’t be able to walk all the way round the walls. I suppose there isn’t a haunted room I could sleep in? The house is fairly old, isn’t it? Do you think it might have a ghost?”

"I shouldn't wonder," said his mother, relieved to find him give way so readily about the tower. "Tell you what we can do. There are some snuffy brown books in the library, I noticed, and one of them might be a history of the house. That would tell us, I should think."

"Oh, good! I hope the ghost clanks and groans."

"I can't understand Hamish giving in at once like that about not sleeping in the tower," remarked Laura, when their son had gone to bed.

"Oh, he's a reasonable kid," said Gavin, easily. "Now he's seen the place he's probably vastly relieved that he's been refused permission. Dashed eerie, those flanking towers, particularly the middle one at the end of the kitchen garden. And that, I might tell you, was the effect it had on me in *daylight*. When we came away from it, Hamish asked me whether I thought I'd heard somebody singing."

"And had you?"

"No, I hadn't, but Hamish realised he'd be nervous at night, I could tell. Of course he'd never have admitted it in so many words, but it wouldn't do him any good at his age to feel he'd got to stick it out—and, of course, once committed, he *would* stick it out. Like mother, like son, darling Laura!"

"Well, look, are we doing the right thing, then, in going to the place? Do you think we ought to call it off?"

"I suggest we all sleep on it, and talk it over in the morning. We're committed to nothing at present. What did you think of it yourself?"

"I rather fell in love with it. The Norman keep is grand. The house is a bit shabby, but it's charming, and although some of the furniture is modern, it's discreet, and fits in with the period. But if Hamish isn't going to be happy, well, that's that. It would be horrid if he didn't like his birthday present."

But, at breakfast on the following morning, Hamish was lyrical on the subject of the castle. When he had gone out, Laura said to Dame Beatrice,

"Gavin thinks Hamish may be nervous about staying at the castle. What do you think?"

"Oh, no, you mustn't go so far as that, Laura," protested her husband. "I don't think he's nervous at all, except about sleeping alone on the top of one of the towers, and I'm very pleased he doesn't want to do that."

"You said the towers were eerie, and I have a feeling that the battlements may not be in good repair."

"Oh, they're not dangerous. I'd be the first to condemn them if they were. Look here, why don't you and Dame B. fix another appointment with Mrs. Dysey? After all, if we're going to pay her for a three months' tenancy, she must expect us to take a bit of interest. What do you say, Dame B.?"

"I suggest that we wait for my solicitor to meet hers to draw up the agreement, and then tell Mrs. Dysey that we should like to see the place once more before I sign. We could, in fact, take a surveyor with us. That should either confirm or put an end to any doubts."

## CHAPTER THREE

### Open to Inspection

"They have ridden o'er moss and moor,  
And they have met neither rich nor poor."

*Earl Brand*

There seemed, after all, no good or sufficient reason for changed minds. The surveyor confirmed that the towers and the walls which connected them were not in the least dangerous and that the house was in good repair, so, at the beginning of August, the party drove in two cars from the Stone House in Hampshire to Dysey Castle, and George, chauffeur to Dame Beatrice, helped the castle gardener and Gavin to carry in the luggage.

"There's one snag," said Laura, "apart from having to open up on Wednesdays and Saturdays, I mean. There is only one bathroom and no hot water system."

"I don't really mind not having a bath as often as the rest of you," said Hamish. "I mean, *someone's* got to stand down, so it had better be me."

"It certainly *won't* be you," said his mother.

"I think we'd better stick him under the pump in the yard," said his father. "It *is* a disadvantage to have only one bathroom. It looks as though we shall have to divide up into morning and evening rubbers."

"I *really* don't mind going without a bath, if it will help," said Hamish, with hopeful earnestness.

“What *might* help,” said Laura, “is to find a decent place where we can swim. We’ll go exploring tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow,” Hamish pointed out, “is Wednesday, and on Wednesdays, according to the terms of your contract, as I understand them...”

“Oh, Lord!” said Laura. “Yes, that’s right. We have to open up to visitors. Still, perhaps no one will come.”

“Oh, but they *must* come,” said her son. “I’ve got all sorts of plans for showing them round.”

“At what hour are we expected to throw wide our gates?” Dame Beatrice enquired.

“There are notices to be put out, I think,” said Hamish, “but I’ll attend to those. There’s no need for anyone else to bother. We open at half-past two. Personally, I hope *dozens* of people come, otherwise it’s a waste of an afternoon. Which of you is going on duty with me?”

“We’d better toss for it,” said Gavin. “You call, Dame B., will you?”

Dame Beatrice won the toss.

“I choose to remain here with Hamish,” she said, “while you two go off together. At what time do we dismiss the last of the visitors?”

“They’re supposed to be all out by six,” said the omniscient Hamish. “Still, if they’re enjoying themselves, I suppose we could allow them half an hour extra, couldn’t we? The only thing is...what about tea? There are theirs *and* ours to be considered.”

“That will be allowed for,” said Dame Beatrice. “Do we permit our guests to picnic in the courtyard?”

“No, not in the courtyard,” said Hamish, decisively. “I will put up a very large notice at the entrance to the gatehouse. We’ll give them passing-out tickets and they can go out and picnic on the hillside. I’ll put a litter-bin there and then we can let them in again if there’s time and they want to come back. This,” he added, in satisfied, anticipatory tones, “is going to be jolly good fun, let me tell you.”

He spent most of the following morning in composing his notices (on kitchen paper provided by the cook) and in affixing these to pieces of cardboard with flour and water paste supplied by the same agency.

“What a good thing all the groceries came in those cardboard boxes,” he observed, eyeing the results of his handiwork with legitimate pride. “Cook let me make charcoal in the kitchen fire to do the lettering, and it looks much more historical than if I’d used ink or crayons, don’t you think?”

“Marvellous!” said Laura, who was looking forward to the afternoon out with her husband. The two of them set off in Gavin’s car after an early lunch. Hamish set up his notices and then, promising to let Dame Beatrice know if and when her services as assistant guide were required, he took a stool and his father’s binoculars into the gatehouse entry and prepared to wait for visitors.

Dame Beatrice settled herself at a writing table in one of the rooms on the ground floor which commanded a view of the gatehouse archway, and alternately studied the collected poems of Walter de la Mare and the wide-shouldered back and thick dark hair of the boy. At the end of thirty-five minutes she laid aside the book, for Hamish had abandoned his post and, having emerged from the shadow of the gatehouse, was coming towards her. She tapped on the window to let him know where to find her. He smiled, waved, and broke into a trot.

“I say,” he said, as he entered the room, “they don’t seem in any hurry to turn up, do they? But it’s just as well. I’ve just realised that I haven’t anything to put the money in, and I haven’t anything to sell them, either.”

“To sell them?”

“Yes. Picture postcards, you know, and guide books. Oh, there’s one thing they can buy, if I could get hold of a small table. Lots of bits have fallen off the walls here and there. I suppose you couldn’t organise me a table and take the

entrance money for me while I collect a few bits, could you? We can sell them as souvenirs, so they've all got something to take home with them and show their friends. That way, we'll get lots more visitors, you see, because their friends will be envious and will all want souvenirs, too."

"A big pudding-basin would do for the money," said Dame Beatrice, "and there is a suitable table in the hall. Put a cloth on it so that the pieces of stone will not scratch its surface. It has drop ends, so that it will be a simple matter for us to negotiate doorways. Then I suggest that you return to your post, where you may be badly needed, whilst I collect a sufficiency of souvenirs for you to chaffer with."

The first visitors turned up at half-past three, just after the table, with pudding-basin, cloth, and small chunks of masonry, had been placed in position. So fully occupied had Hamish been in assembling and arranging his souvenirs that he did not realise he had customers until he heard the sound of their car as it pulled up in the narrow road which led to the gatehouse. A man and two women got out. Hamish advanced towards them.

"Good afternoon," he said. "Would you mind just moving your car on to the grass? Otherwise you'll be blocking the road, I'm afraid." Another thought struck him. "If I move my table and stool a little, you can drive in and use our car park, of course, if you'd care to pay an extra shilling. Thank you. That will be eight and sixpence, please."

Hypnotised, the party re-entered their car and drove into the concreted half of the courtyard. Dame Beatrice came out to take Hamish's place at the seat of custom, and Hamish, in his capacity of guide, said briskly,

"I think you'd better look over the house first, and then you can do as you like. You can picnic in your car, if you want to, although, actually, it's nicer outside the walls. We have a lovely hillside. You've got two and a half hours, so there's plenty of time to see everything."

The party made short work of the house, and the gentleman asked Hamish, with a grin, whether the place was haunted.

"Well, we hope so," Hamish gravely replied, "but I haven't had time yet to do any research on the subject. We only came down here yesterday."

"It wouldn't be the *house* that's haunted," one of the ladies remarked. Hamish made nothing of this. He had just realised that there was no Visitors' Book for the guests to sign. Having released his party with an admonition to "take care on the newel staircases; they're tricky," he dashed over to Dame Beatrice.

"Oh, a Visitors' Book? Quite, *quite* essential," she agreed. "If you will take over the gate, I am sure I can find something suitable."

Laura and Gavin returned in time for dinner to find that their son had entertained fourteen visitors and had collected the sum of exactly two pounds.

"There were five cars and they all used my car park," he said. "Oh, and two men tipped me. I suppose I may keep the five shillings?"

"I should think you've earned it," said Gavin. "Are you tired?"

"Oh, no, but I'm hungry. I didn't have time for much tea, and I don't think Mrs. Dame had any."

On the following day Laura took him for a walk to see whether they could find anywhere to swim. There was a large lake on the other side of the hill, but it was surrounded by reed beds of such density that Hamish became discouraged, and suggested that they turn back and go for a drive in the car. Left to herself, Laura would have gone on, but she gave in gracefully and they returned to the castle.

During the walk Hamish had given her a detailed account of the visitors of the day before. Laura had listened



appreciatively. There was one remark of his which had impressed her, however. When he had described the first party who had turned up, he had mentioned the gentleman's satirical enquiry about the house being haunted.

"I told him I was going to do some research, and then one of the ladies said it wouldn't be the *house* that was haunted. I wonder what she meant?" he had said. Laura had replied lightly that she supposed the woman found it more romantic to believe that the *castle*, rather than the house, had the reputation for having a ghost, and then they spotted some wild duck flying over the water and the conversation took a different turn.

On the way back, however, Hamish suddenly said,

"You know, mamma, it was, now I come to think it over, rather peculiar yesterday."

"About the ghost?" asked Laura, on whom his report of the woman's remark had made more impression than she had allowed him to realise. "I don't see anything peculiar in people wanting to know whether an old building is haunted. Some just do it for a leg-pull."

"Yes, I know. That's what the man was doing—trying to pull my leg. But that wasn't the only thing."

"Oh?"

"No. I followed up another party—they were rather loud-voiced and sort of jolly, I suppose. They brought sausages and crisps, and beer in tins, and sat on the step of their car to have their tea, and left greasy paper bags and the beer tins about in the courtyard. I couldn't very well say anything, of course, so I just cleared it all up, but I thought they looked the kind of people who might carve their names on things, so I followed them about, and when they were standing looking at the flanking towers, one of them asked me where it was that it happened. I begged her pardon and she just laughed and said to think nothing of it. I was quite pleased when they went, because I don't think they really

appreciated anything they saw. When I suggested that they might like to buy one of the souvenirs they laughed, and the man said not unless I could guarantee *that it came off the right tower*. Rather mysterious, don't you think, mamma?"

"They sound the sort of people who hope somebody was murdered in the castle—Princes in the Tower sort of stuff," said Laura. "On Saturday your father and I will take over, and then you and I can compare notes afterwards."

She reported the conversation to Gavin and Dame Beatrice after dinner that night, and added that she wondered whether it was a good idea to allow Hamish to be in charge of the visitors. When Saturday came, however, her son begged so hard to be allowed to keep the gate again that his father gave permission, and elected, to Laura's relief, to stay with him; so Gavin and Hamish remained on duty at the castle and Laura and Dame Beatrice drove to the nearest seaside place, some forty miles away, for Laura to test the opportunities for bathing.

They used Gavin's car and Laura drove, for Dame Beatrice had sent back her own car and her chauffeur George, the car to be garaged and George to take a fortnight's leave. He was then to place himself at the disposal of Dame Beatrice's usual stand-in at her London clinic until Gavin's leave expired and he and his car were obliged to return to London.

The bathing facilities proved to be adequate. Laura went for a swim, she and Dame Beatrice had tea at an hotel and they returned to the castle for a rather late dinner to learn that a motor-coach load had turned up and had been admitted to the house in parties of six organised by Gavin and the driver.

"Thirty-six of them," said Hamish exultantly, "and I sold three souvenirs at sixpence each, but I couldn't charge

them for parking, because the motor-coach was a bit too wide to go through the gatehouse archway.”

“Any funny questions?” asked Laura, when she was alone with her husband, Hamish having gone to bed and Dame Beatrice having removed herself to her own room so that the couple (who, in her opinion, were able to see all too little of one another) could be together without a third party being present.

“Funny questions? Oh, you mean of the ghoulish sort? One or two of the coach party asked me whether there were any bloodstains to be seen. I told them their guess was as good as mine, so they rushed off, in a hopeful spirit, to look for them. I don’t know whether all custodians of ancient monuments are asked these idiotic questions, or whether we’re specially favoured. The coach party was followed up by a female who arrived on a motor-scooter and, upon being shown over the house by me while Hamish was having his tea, asked me whether I was psychic.”

“What did you say?”

“I said not so that she’d notice, to which she responded ‘Pity, pity,’ and we left it at that.”

“Do you think the castle *has* got a sinister reputation?”

“Well, if it has, and it brings the customers along, all the better, say I.”

“So long as Hamish doesn’t get ideas in his head!”

“The only ideas Hamish has in his head at present are that we took four pounds fourteen and six today, and that he must try to hit upon some extra wheezes with which to fleece the general public. I’ve promised to do some pencil sketches for him to sell.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Boatmen

“For the wee worms are my bedfellows  
An’ could clay is my sheets...”

*Proud Lady Margaret*

The Open Afternoons, as Laura termed them, soon established a pattern. On Wednesdays came the small parties of what might be called the private visitors to the castle, and on Saturdays, in addition to these, came the motor-coach trippers, surprisingly well-behaved if not always particularly litter-conscious.

After the first Wednesday and Saturday it became Dame Beatrice’s practice to give the servants the afternoon and evening off. A substantial lunch served to the tenants at midday was followed by a cold-snack self-service supper, and the servants were expected to be back before half-past ten. It was nearly four miles to the nearest bus stop and it became Gavin’s humane and kindly practice to load up his car with cook, parlourmaid, and housemaid and transport them thither, returning to meet them when they alighted at night from the ten o’clock bus. This concession had the double advantage of pleasing the servants and also of insuring that they returned at the agreed time.

The gardener, a single man, lodged at the home farm on the south side of the hill, and the kitchenmaid preferred a chair, a love-story, and a bag of sweets to other, more active pleasures. As, for the rest of the week, she seemed to

be on her feet from morning to night—for she was an extremely willing girl—Dame Beatrice commended her prudence in taking her weight off them when she could.

On the last Wednesday of Gavin's leave—he was due to return to duty on the following Monday—he had promised to take his son sea-fishing from a boat. Hamish, with thoughts of catching a shark, was in high excitement, and, having taken the maids to the bus stop, father and son drove on, instead of returning to the castle.

Left alone, except for the kitchenmaid washing up the dishes used at lunch, Laura and Dame Beatrice put out small table, chair, large pudding basin, Visitors' Book, roll of tickets, and half-a-dozen attractive little pencil sketches done by Gavin at his son's behest, and Laura was preparing to seat herself at the receipt of custom when Dame Beatrice remarked,

"It is a particularly fine afternoon. Why do you not go off and enjoy yourself? We need not expect an overwhelming number of visitors, I think. Wednesdays are never very busy, and three rooms take but little time to show. I can easily manage by myself."

"Well, so can I, then. *You* go off and enjoy yourself."

"I am not as fond of walking as you are, and I have letters to write. Take your tea and a book. It would be a pity to waste such a lovely afternoon."

Allowing herself to be persuaded, Laura agreed to take what she protested would be only a short walk. She went northwards of the castle by a woodland path which ran uphill for a mile or so and then dropped gently down through more woods to the considerable lake which she had previously visited with Hamish.

There was no well-defined path round the lake, but a narrow track had been trodden here and there, probably by boys bent on exploration, Laura thought. She had the lake to herself, so far as she could see, but this was not very far, as silver birches and the tall, thick reed-beds screened a

good deal of the view. The reeds, in fact, had provided a major disappointment, for when, accompanied by Hamish, she had looked for a possible bathing-place, the reeds, so far as she had been able to ascertain, were as impenetrable as a jungle. Now that she was alone she proposed to circumnavigate the whole of the lake to look for a spot where it might be possible to enter the water.

In addition to a small haversack which contained food and a paperback detective story, Laura had slung binoculars over her shoulder and from time to time she stopped and, through them, studied the lake and the surrounding countryside. Suddenly, from what appeared to be the broadest part of the reed-bed, out came a boat containing two men. They were readily distinguishable through the glasses. Laura watched them for a short while and then walked on. Where a boat could gain access to the water, so could she, she concluded, and, the trodden way becoming a little better defined, she mended her pace and walked briskly.

By this time she was well beyond the point at which she and Hamish had given up the quest for a bathing-place. For the next ten minutes trees hid the boat from view, but, when she came to the end of the lakeside covert, which here included a close-set belt of silver birches, she discovered how the boatmen had contrived to be where they were. A deep, slow-moving stream, which apparently fed the lake, flowed directly across her path and there was no bridge.

“Good enough,” thought Laura, halting on the bank. “I’ll swim here tomorrow.” She unhitched the field-glasses and the haversack and seated herself. The bank was grassy and shelved gently down to the river, a pleasant spot for a picnic. Laura took her time. There were still hours of daylight to come and the weather was warm and pleasant.

When she had eaten the food, read a couple of chapters, and finished the tea in the thermos flask, she

decided that, as she could not complete her tour of the lake, she might as well explore the bank of the stream. After a skirmish with gorse and brambles, she found a path. It meandered with the windings of the river, and, after twenty minutes of walking, Laura rounded a bend and found herself in view of a landing-stage on the opposite bank. Behind the landing-stage a short, broad staithe had been cut and at the farther end of the staithe was a small boathouse containing a roomy dinghy with an outboard motor, a punt, a skiff, and a canoe. Beyond the boathouse, and to the right of it, Laura could see a fairly large chalet-type house.

As she looked at it, a woman came out, walked as far as the head of the staithe, and threw some water from a bucket into the river. She did not appear to notice Laura, but shaded her eyes and gazed downstream before she returned to the house. Laura thought that something about her was familiar, and that she might be Mrs. Dysey. She continued her walk, enjoying the air, the sunshine, and the river scenery, until she decided that, as it was well over an hour since she had had her picnic, it was time that she went back to help cope with the visitors to the castle.

She had retraced her steps to within a hundred yards of where the stream joined the lake when she heard the sound of oars. The boatmen were returning. Round the bend they came, and she stood still to watch them go by. Instead of that, however, they pulled in to the bank and the older of the two, a man in his sixties, Laura thought, caught at an overhanging branch to stay the progress of the boat. As it was obvious that his intention was to speak to her, Laura waited politely.

“What are you doing here, madam?” he demanded.

“I am out for a walk,” replied Laura, considerably surprised at the question and nettled by the tone in which it had been couched.

“Don’t you realise that you’re trespassing?”

“No, I certainly had no idea that I was.”

"Well, you are. These banks are private property."

"I apologise, if that is so, but I've seen no indication of anything of the sort."

"We shall have to put up notices. Have you done any damage?"

"Certainly not."

"Left any litter about?"

"Look here," said Laura, "I've apologised for trespassing, and now I shall be very much obliged if you will either alter your tone or allow me to conclude this conversation and go on my way."

The younger man spoke for the first time.

"You mustn't mind him," he said. "His bark is much worse than his bite. Besides, he's a bit cross because he hasn't caught anything. Now, look," he added to the older man, "you can see the lady's harmless, Uncle. You've had your say. Bid her good-bye nicely and let her get back home."

"Where *is* your home?" demanded the older man. "Look here, if you'll promise not to spread it abroad, you can come along here if you like, but I can't have every Tom, Dick, and Harry milling around. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly," said Laura, her annoyance giving way to a feeling of amusement. "Thank you for the permission. I had really come along this afternoon to find out whether it was possible to get into the lake for a swim."

"Swim in the lake! Good God, young woman, it's a great deal colder than Dante's Hell."

"I've swum in Lake Ullswater at this time of year."

"Oh, well, it'll be your funeral, nobody else's!"

"I may, then?"

"On your own head be it! I fell in once, out of a canoe, and I assure you it's not an experience I care to repeat. Where did you say you came from?"

"I didn't say, but actually I'm staying at Dysey Castle."

"Staying at Dysey Castle? Good God, what next?"



"We've rented it for three months. It was advertised. Why, what's the matter with it?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing! What *should* be the matter with it?"

"Dysey by name and dicey by nature, that castle," put in the younger man. "So Auntie Etta has managed to let it all right? I suppose people's memories are short, or else ghouls and vampires have become the tenants. Are you a ghoul?" He smiled as he asked the question.

"No, I don't think so," Laura replied. She laughed, but somewhat unconvincingly, she felt. She disliked the persistent suggestion that there was something sinister about the castle.

"Well, we must be getting along. If you catch pneumonia in that lake, don't you blame me. Damn' foolish gals will do damn' foolish things. Good afternoon to you," said the older man, letting go of the branch he was holding.

He sounded almost genial. The younger man pushed off from the bank. Laura watched the boat until it reached the bend, then she waved a cheerful hand and gained the lakeside. It seemed quite a long way home, but that was because she wanted to tell her employer about the mysterious references to the castle. She had not liked to ask the boatmen for an explanation, but their remarks tied in unpleasantly with the questions which had been asked by some of the Wednesday and Saturday visitors, she felt.

She returned to the castle to find Dame Beatrice seated placidly at the table in front of the gatehouse archway. A small pile of stamped and addressed envelopes was beside the pudding-basin, in which reposed two half-crowns.

"You don't seem to have had many visitors," Laura remarked. "I'll make you some tea." She did this, and then brought out another chair and seated herself by the side of her employer. "I've met our nearest neighbours, apart from the people at the home farm." She described the encounter with the two boatmen. "It does seem as though there's

some mystery attached to this place," she added, in conclusion.

"Not a true mystery; merely an unexplained death," said Dame Beatrice.

"How do you know?"

"I asked. My visitors this afternoon were two young men who came on motor-cycles. I showed them the three rooms in the house and then suggested that they should explore the walls and the keep for themselves. One of them asked me whether I did not feel nervous at being alone in such a place. I explained that I was not alone, and enquired their reason for thinking that I might be nervous. It transpired that there has been an unexplained death—possibly a murder—here."

"Good gracious me! How long ago?"

"The summer before last. It seems that there was reason to suspect foul play, but that nothing has ever come of the enquiry which the County Police conducted."

"They should have called in Scotland Yard."

"I suppose there was not enough to go on. Although the circumstances were suspicious, the death could have been accidental. The body was found at the foot of a flanking tower, but the young men did not know which, and betrayed disappointment at my equal lack of knowledge. They seemed to think that I should have pressed Mrs. Dysey for details. They were oblivious of the fact that, as I had heard nothing about the death, I was hardly to be blamed for not having put their questions to her."

"Wonder whether Gavin knows anything about it? It's rather a habit of his, when he's on leave and we're away, to make friends with the local inspector or superintendent. If he's done that this time, I should think they're bound to have told him about this place. Of course, he wouldn't mention it to me. He's still under the impression that I need to be shielded from the baser facts of life. Anyway, I bet that

if he *has* made himself known to the local police, he's got the whole story from them."

She had to wait until her husband came home, and Hamish had gone to bed, before she could put this assumption to the test. Then, when supper was over, and while there was nearly an hour to go before Gavin went to meet the servants at the bus stop, she said to Dame Beatrice,

"Tell him about your two visitors."

"Oh, did you have only two? Bad show! Hardly worth giving up your afternoon," said Gavin, sympathetically.

"Oh, we had seventeen altogether. They came in a bunch at between half-past four and five," said Laura.

"Any more ghoulish enquiries? I've tracked those first ones to their source, by the way."

"Yes, we thought you might have done, so please come clean. Tell us all. We know lots already, so there's no need to spare our feelings. This afternoon I went for a walk." She described her encounter with the uncle and nephew. "And while I was gone," she added, "these two boys came to look over the place and told Mrs. Croc. a little, and that little she repeated to me."

"I see. Well, in that case, I suppose I'd better tell you the rest. About a week ago I made the acquaintance of the mob at Quinley-on-Sea police station and it came out, of course, that I was staying at Dysey Castle. Then they told me the story. I didn't tell *you* for the very good reason that you believe in ghosts, and I didn't want you to wake screaming in the night, thinking you were seeing things."

"I've never screamed in my life, neither in the night nor at any other time, so don't be insulting. And I *don't* believe in ghosts. I'm simply afraid of them, that's all. Most people are, so what of it? *Is* there supposed to be a ghost here?"

"Not so far as I am aware. There is no tradition to that effect, although no doubt there are those who would

welcome such a story. No, as those boys indicated, there has been a violent and unexplained death here.”

“Who was the dead man?”

“A certain Tom Dysey, husband of the woman we’ve met. He was killed the summer before last—two years ago, almost to the day, in fact, on which we came here. A good deal of suspicion fell upon Mrs. Dysey, but the police could obtain nothing helpful. Mrs. Dysey, later, wrote an account for one of the Sunday papers, and the paper, it appears, studded this account with indulgent captions. They reported her as being fearlessly outspoken, a martyr to bureaucracy, an ill-used but conscientious citizen, an inspiration to her sex, a crusader for the Rights of the Common Man, and a good many other things which the superintendent did not remember.”

“But why should Mrs. Dysey have come under so much suspicion? The police must have had something to go on.”

“That’s just the trouble. They really had very little. What it all boiled down to was a question of, possibly, marital infidelity. The dead man was Mrs. Dysey’s husband, as I say, and a letter was found, although the writer has never been identified.”

“Where was the letter?”

“That’s the funny part. If it had been to arrange a secret meeting, you’d have expected it to be destroyed, but it wasn’t. It was in the dead man’s wallet, and that was in the inside pocket of the jacket he had been wearing.”

“*Had* been wearing? He was killed during the night, then?”

“At some time between midnight and one o’clock in the morning, the doctor thought. The body was found by the gardener at the foot of that middle flanking tower at the end of the kitchen garden. As I’ve indicated, the police theory is that he was keeping an assignation, but nothing, so far, has been proved, and nobody came forward with any

information. The letter was typed and there was no signature."

"Well, that's not surprising, I suppose. You'd be sticking your neck out to the extent of almost asking to be charged with murder, wouldn't you?—not to speak of all the embarrassing questions you'd have to answer, anyway, if you were a girl, and were meeting a married man in the middle of the night."

"He was not necessarily meeting a girl. There was nothing in the letter to indicate the sex of the person with whom he had the assignation, but there was one obvious reason for choosing that particular tower."

"The only one you can get to without being spotted from the house? Yes, that's right. There aren't any windows in that end gable."

"You would need to use the servants' staircase, though, if you intended to nip out by the side door. Dame B. won't let our lot use it. She says it's dangerous if they're carrying anything and can't catch hold of the bannisters, but I don't suppose the Dyseys worried too much about that."

"What else did they tell you at the police station?"

"Nothing much, except that the dead man was wearing cricketing flannels. They thought that was a bit odd, considering the time of night, and the fact that there was a dinner-party that evening."

"They might have held a flannel-dance after dinner. What did he have on his feet?"

"I saw the official photographs. He had nothing on his feet except his socks."

"Did you see the report of the medical evidence given at the inquest?" asked Dame Beatrice.

"No, they hadn't got a *verbatim* copy. Multiple injuries consistent with a heavy fall was what it came to. No doubt that's boiling it down a bit, of course."

"Did he fall, or was he pushed?—and the police incline to the latter theory," said Laura. "Had they any other reason

to suspect foul play?"

"They'd dearly like to know why he was masquerading in his whites at that hour, of course, and they are equally curious about the identity of the person he went there to meet."

"Of course, that person may not have been guilty," argued Laura. "I mean, people do batsy things such as *accidentally* falling downstairs. Still, it's all very mysterious, and I'm more than ever thankful that Hamish is safely in the house and not perched up there on a column like St. Simon Stylites. Not that Hamish could be like Saint Anything, come to that!"

"What about these men you met?"

"Well, I may have a suspicious mind, but I thought they seemed a bit fishy, especially the older one. He was most unpleasant at first, and told me I was trespassing, and then he turned right round and was quite goodhumoured, and there didn't seem any reason for the change. Incidentally, I've an impression that Mrs. Dysey may be staying with them, but I was too far off to be certain. I wonder why the police suspected her of murdering her husband?"

"We always suspect people's nearest and dearest, and it often works out," said Gavin.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Childe Roland

“His mither she was walking out  
To see what she could see,  
And there she saw her one young son  
Set on the tower sae hie.”

*Earl Mar's Daughter*

On the following morning, taking it for granted that the irascible older boatman would tolerate their presence in his waters and would refrain from classifying them as “every Tom, Dick, and Harry,” Laura took her husband and son to bathe in the lake.

“I’m told it’s dashed chilly,” she warned them, “so, if you don’t like it, don’t mind getting out at once. There won’t be anything cissy about it, Hamish,” she added sternly to her son. “It’s well known that boys feel the cold, so mind, if you find it unpleasant in the water, out you come.”

“Ten minutes will be *my* limit, anyway,” said Gavin. “What’s more, I’ve asked in the kitchen for a large flask of coffee.”

Dame Beatrice saw them off and then went to see about lunch. When she had given the necessary orders, the cook, feeling her apron pulled by the kitchenmaid, said,

“Oh, yes, mum, that reminds me. Zena wants to speak to you private, if you’d be so good.”

“Oh, dear!” said Dame Beatrice, with the sinking heart known to all householders at the prospect of losing valuable

domestic help. "You had better come along to the morning-room, then, Zena." The girl followed her. "Shut the door, my dear, and sit down. Now, what is it?"

"Please, mum, you won't laugh at me, will you?"

"So it isn't her notice, thank goodness," thought Dame Beatrice. She answered, "Certainly not, Zena. It is most unkind to laugh at people. What made you think I might do such a thing?"

"Well, mum, I haven't no doubt there's them as would. Or else they'd tell me off for bein' silly."

"I shall do neither. If you are in any sort of trouble, I shall do my best to help you, so fire away."

"Well, mum, could it be the 'ouse is 'aunted?"

The artless question was not unexpected by Dame Beatrice. She said,

"What have you been hearing?" She assumed, naturally, that the young girl had heard something (probably garbled, at that) about the death in the tower. To her astonishment, the girl replied,

"I bin hearin' singin', mum."

"Well, there's nothing in that, Zena. Lots of people sing when they're going about their work," said Dame Beatrice, without the slightest expectation that this would clear up the matter.

"Not in the dead of night, mum."

"What do you mean?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said the girl. "I don't rightly know what I *does* mean. Only, mum, I don't like it."

"How many times have you heard it?"

"Three times now, countin' las' night. And then, mum, there's the pie and the bread and the milk, and other things as well."

"Taken from the larder, do you mean? Well, that doesn't sound like a ghost. It sounds like some poor old tramp."

"Would a tramp sing, mum?"



"I have no idea. Not unless he wished to attract attention, I would say."

"If he was on the food-sneakin' lark, he wouldn't want to do that, mum."

"One would suppose not. You hear this singing when you are in bed, do you?"

"Oh, yes, mum, and 'orrid creepy it is."

"Let us go up to your room and you shall tell me more about it."

The house was on two main floors. There were also a couple of attics, but the servants were not relegated to these. The parlourmaid and the housemaid, who were sisters, shared a room at the top of a flight of dark stairs which Dame Beatrice had ordered the servants not to use because she believed it to be dangerous, the cook occupied what had evidently been the dressing-room to the principal bedroom (one of the three rooms shown to the public), and the kitchenmaid had a bed in a small chamber built above the pantry. It had been intended, presumably, for a closet or store-room, but it had a casement window which could be opened and which overlooked the grim Norman keep behind the house. Dame Beatrice walked over to this window and looked out.

"Do you draw your curtains at night?" she asked.

"No, I doesn't, mum. I depends on the mornin' sunshine to wake me up in time to go down and get the fire raked out and laid, ready for cookin' the breakfast, being as Cook has the alarm clock."

One of the things which Laura and Hamish found romantic, Dame Beatrice inconvenient, and Gavin infuriating, was that there was neither gas nor electricity laid on. Water for baths was heated in the copper and carried in pails to the only bathroom. Fortunately this bathroom was next-door to the scullery and had originally been the wash-house. What the cook thought about the

kitchen arrangements Dame Beatrice and Laura had agreed together that it would be wiser not to enquire.

"Has anyone else heard this singing, do you know?" Dame Beatrice asked.

"No, they hasn't, mum, because I asked Cook and she said she hadn't, and she asked Vi'let and Daffy and they hadn't heard it neether. But then, they wouldn't, you see, would they, sleepin' t'other side the house?"

"It seems to come from the keep, then?"

"The what, please, mum?"

"That big tower opposite your window."

"Well, it sort of must, mustn't it, without it's somebody roamin' about down there in the kitching garding."

"I will get your bed moved across the landing. You may use that little room where we have put the luggage. The suitcases can be put in here."

"Oh, thank you, mum! I'm much obliged, I'm sure."

"And I shall ask Cook about the disappearance of the food. I wonder why she has not mentioned it to me?"

"She believes I took it, mum, though I swore my Bible oath I never. She said she wouldn't report it for fear of me gettin' the sack."

"That was very good of her," commented Dame Beatrice drily, ironically certain that Cook's goodness derived less from Cook's kindly nature than from a desire not to lose so willing and pliable a kitchenmaid. "If anything else occurs to upset you, you must let me know. There is always something we can do about it."

"Yes, mum, thank you, mum. *You* don't believe I took them pie and things, mum, do you?"

"No, I don't. Even if I did, I should never dismiss a young and hungry creature for stealing food. I shall speak to Cook about it."

"You won't turn her against me, mum, will you? I shouldn't care for her to have it in for me."

“Do not worry, Zena. Get back now to your work. I will see that there is a key to your changed bedroom, so that you can lock the door if you feel at all nervous.”

“Poor little blighter,” said Gavin, when he, Laura, and Hamish had returned from swimming and Dame Beatrice had taken him into consultation. “It strikes me that it wouldn’t be a bad idea to make a closer inspection of that keep than we’ve made so far. If you remember, Hamish also heard somebody singing.”

“Oh, did he?”

“Yes. I mentioned it to Laura. Come to think of it, I don’t believe you were in the room at the time. Still, it lends substance to the girl’s story, doesn’t it? I think your theory of the tramp is a likely one. He probably dosses down in the keep or in one of the towers. If so, I’m more than ever glad that Hamish elected to sleep in the house. We’ll certainly have a jolly good look around the place. I’m only sorry I’ve nearly come to the end of my leave. What with this unexplained death and now this midnight songster, I could bear to have a man about the place.”

“Yes, yours is a comforting sex,” Dame Beatrice agreed. “I understand your anxiety. I wonder whether Denis and that friend of his would come?”

“What about Jonathan and Deborah? Jon would be more use in a rough-house than Denis—not that I’m anticipating anything of the sort. I wouldn’t be justified in leaving Laura and Hamish here if I thought that. But—well, you know how it is.”

“I’ll try Jonathan first, then. It will be extremely gratifying to see Deborah again. I see all too little of them since they buried themselves in the Cotswolds. They can have the room you and Laura sleep in, and Laura can move into the room next door to Hamish. I must see about having the bed aired.”

“Good show! I say, we’ve got an invitation to go to lunch tomorrow with those boathouse people Laura got to know. You’re included, of course. Will you come with us? I’d rather like to get the measure of them, if Laura thinks they’re fishy.”

“With pleasure. I shall enjoy meeting them. How did the invitation come about?”

“Oh, they were fishing from their boat when we got there, so Laura thought she’d better hail them and ask whether they would mind if Hamish and I joined her in the water. They chugged over to us—their boat had a small outboard motor—and the old chap told us what damn’ fools we were, hoped, in his genial way, that we’d all get pneumonia, and then asked me what I did for a living. When I told him, he issued this invitation. I think he wants to talk about this corpse of ours.”

“Interesting. I am all agog. Well, I will write to Jonathan and Deborah, and I must also send for George. I shall need the car when you take yours away.”

She waited until after lunch before she spoke to the cook about the missing food, and received that worthy’s assurance that she “*had* wondered about young Zena, mum,” but was now completely convinced that the girl was innocent. She assented without demur to Dame Beatrice’s suggestion that a tramp must have got into the larder and helped himself, adding that the window might have been left open at some time or another. She “could not say if it *’ad* been, or if it *’adn’t*,” but as she herself always personally locked the side door and the back door, leaving the front door to be attended to by Gavin, “if it weren’t the window, mum, I’d be *’ard* put to it to say *what* it was.” However, it appeared that she was now regretful of her first suspicions that Zena had stolen downstairs during the night watches to restore her tissues with illicit calories, and took back all that she had said.

"But what made you cease to suspect her?" Dame Beatrice mildly enquired. The cook confessed that, as soon as she realised that the pie and other foods were missing, she had searched Zena's room.

"But I never found a crumb, mum, not so much as a crumb. And, in my opinion, not even a 'uman boa-constrictor could of polished off all that lot in one night."

"When did this theft take place?"

"It would of bin the Wednesday night as you come in on the Toosday, mum."

"After we had entertained our first batch of visitors, in fact. Was that the only time you have missed anything?"

"Well, I'm not too sure about that, mum. I *did* think p'raps there was more of the cooked 'am gorn than what I thought I remembered, but an 'ole 'am, mum, well, it do arst to be cut and come again, like, so I can't rightly say, one way or the other, and, anyway, would not be willin'."

"And which day was this?"

"Well, I looked at it a bit old-fashioned last Thursday mornin', mum. Ah, and I did wonder about the Sunday joint o' beef."

"You haven't noticed anybody loitering about the place, of course?"

"Only the Wednesday visitors that very first Wednesday you was 'ere, before you give us the Wednesday and Saturday afternoons and evenin's orf, which I may say is 'ighly appreciated by one and all, mum."

"It certainly sounds as though we may have an uninvited guest at times," said Dame Beatrice to Gavin, later.

"I'm more than ever anxious to have a man about the place when I'm gone, then. A further thought occurs to me. Haven't Jonathan and Deborah got a bloomin' great Hound of the Baskervilles? Invite them to bring it with them."

Dame Beatrice did so, and Gavin drove off to post that letter and the rest of her correspondence. He got back to the castle at three and announced that he was going to attempt to photograph the interior of the keep. He had already photographed the outside from all angles, and, in addition, the flanking towers, the curtain walls, the gatehouse, the moat, the kitchen garden, the courtyard, and the Tudor house, so the announcement occasioned no surprise to his son.

"The keep isn't really much of a place inside," said Hamish. "There's nothing you'd want to take a picture of, I shouldn't think. The *outside* is smashing, of course."

"Yes, but I'd like a complete record," said his father, "and I haven't much longer to get it. But there's no need for you to come with me."

"Oh, yes, I'll come, and then you can take a picture of me standing in front of the ghost."

"What ghost?" asked Laura, rather sharply.

"Oh, well, of course, it isn't *really* a ghost. It's an optical illusion, I suppose you'd call it. I'll show you."

"Right. Lead on, Macduff," said Gavin. Entrance to the keep was by way of an outbuilding consisting of a steep, straight, well-worn flight of stone steps, roofed over, and protected at the foot and again at the top by stout, wooden, nail-studded doors, but these were open, and appeared to have been so for many years. At the top was a small, vaulted chamber, probably, Dame Beatrice thought, the chapel. To the left of this, two more stone steps led to a railed gallery which ran from end to end of the keep and terminated in a couple of small rooms. Beyond these, the gallery was continued along the other side of the hall.

These rooms Gavin inspected with the utmost care, for here, if anywhere, did there appear to be adequate shelter for the supposed tramp. Even the closest scrutiny, however, failed to indicate the presence of any recent occupant. They opened out of one another by means of a chevron-moulded

archway of late Norman workmanship, and from each of them rose a newel staircase built in the thickness of the wall and leading up to the crenellated parapet of the battlements.

To keep up the fiction of requiring photographs, Gavin used his camera twice, and the party returned to the entrance to the chapel.

"I haven't noticed any ghost," said Laura to her son.

"No, you don't if you walk all round the gallery as we've just done, but if you go up those two steps again and walk along nearly as far as those two little rooms, and then turn round and come back here the same way, I'm sure you'll see what I mean. I only found it out by accident, and since then I don't much like coming here on my own. I only do it when I tell myself to, just to prove to myself that I can take a dare."

Laura walked along the gallery and then turned round. Framed in the doorway to the chapel was a white figure, eerily human and completely motionless. As, feeling slightly shaken, she walked back towards it, it revealed itself as a trick of light and shade against the white-washed chapel wall, and became a Norman archway once more.

"Well, mamma, could you see what I meant?" her son enquired. Laura nodded.

"Gave me quite a turn," she confessed. "You go and look, Gavin. I'd hate to be in this place by myself."

Gavin did as he was bidden, and then took the photograph of the little boy, but the child's figure broke up the illusion. The ghost had disappeared.

"Remarkable," said Dame Beatrice, when Hamish had retreated into the chapel so that she, too, could observe the phenomenon. "Most realistic and impressive. Let us all go and have some tea."

“Well, we don’t seem to have proved anything about our tramp,” remarked Gavin, when Hamish had gone to bed. “I suppose you feel certain that Zena didn’t pinch that grub and invent the tale about the singing?”

“You said that Hamish heard it, too.”

“The girl may have overheard him tell me so, and used the idea to further her own ends. There certainly wasn’t a sign of anybody dossing down in that keep.”

“I wonder what’s happened to the newel staircases?” said Laura. “Not those which go up to the battlements, but those leading to the ground floor, I mean.”

“You wouldn’t need them, with that straight flight from the ground floor to the chapel,” said her husband.

“You would, to get down to what was the undercroft.”

“All right, I’ll have another look round in the morning, before we go off to this lunch affair with your boat people.”

“I’ll come with you,” said Laura; so together they made an after-breakfast tour of the keep, but all they could see as they peered over from the gallery were some broken-away remnants of what Laura declared might have been the bottom steps of a newel stair leading down from the original floor of the Great Hall to the store-rooms and guard-rooms beneath.

“You couldn’t get directly into a Norman keep from the courtyard,” Laura explained. “In a place like this, you had to climb the grand stair, as we’ve just done, and then descend from the great hall or the kitchen into the depths. It helped to make it more difficult to take the keep by direct assault, you see. The floor of the Great Hall was the first floor, not the ground floor, of the building, but, of course, it’s gone now.”

“Then our bird—if we have a bird—must occupy one of the flanking towers in the curtain wall when he’s at home,” said Gavin. “Let’s have a go at those, too, while we’re about it. After all, it was from that one at the end of the kitchen garden that Hamish heard singing.”



But neither the flanking towers nor the porter's room over the gatehouse showed signs of occupation.

"It doesn't prove anything, though," said Laura. "If there *is* anyone, he knows how to cover his tracks, that's all."

"The nights on which he seems to operate are suggestive, don't you think?" asked Gavin, after a moment's silence.

"It hadn't occurred to me. What, exactly, do you mean?"

"It seems to me that he collects from us on the nights of the early closing day in the nearest town."

"That doesn't sound like a tramp. It means he's got money enough to buy his own food. He's only caught short on Wednesdays, when the shops aren't open, and, I suppose, on Sundays. Is that what you mean? But surely he could lay in a store, if that's so?"

"Well, no. I'm beginning to think that we have a permanent guest, and one who doesn't want to leave any traces of his presence. He eats every scrap of food on the day he gets it, and that covers his tracks, you see."

"I suppose it couldn't be Mrs. Dysey, could it? Anyhow, I hate the idea of our having a regular visitor."

"I agree. If Jon can't come, I shall take you and Hamish away."

"Don't go all Edward Moulton-Barrett on me! I should never leave Mrs. Croc. alone in a place like this, so come off it, please! Meanwhile, where do we go from here? At this moment, I mean."

"You will go to the room vacated by Zena and now tenanted by our bales and boxes, and I shall remain in the keep, from various portions of which I propose to lift up my voice in song. I shall choose sundry of our old Scottish airs, keeping a record of whereabouts I am when I sing each one; you will keep your shell-like ears flapping and make a note

of which tunes, if any, you hear. Do *not* look out of the window."

"Right. It sounds a rather infantile reconstruction, but it may be none the worse for that. Hamish is wolfing soft fruit and young peas in the kitchen garden, though, and will see us. Won't he wonder what we're up to?"

"If he asks, I shall reply, with the truth which is its own best concealment, that we are testing the acoustics of the place. Push off, then, and do an aural Sister Anne. I will come and find you when the performance is at an end."

"You've got a baritone voice. What if the singer is a tenor, or even a soprano? We don't know whether it's a man or a woman, do we?"

"Don't quibble. Your job is to listen, and to listen good—and *don't* use that famous imagination of yours!"

When they foregathered in the room which had been Zena's, Laura said,

"I heard one tune. How many tunes did you sing?"

"I sang five times. Once from the foot of the grand staircase, once from the chapel, once from the middle of the gallery and once from the archway between those two small chambers."

"That's only four."

"As a check—you'll see what I mean in a minute—I sang one tune twice. Which tune did you hear?"

"*Mary of Argyll*—just before you came in here."

"I thought perhaps you would. I sang that one from the keep first of all, but I sang it again from the foot of that flanking tower at the end of the kitchen garden. It was from there that you must have heard it, if you heard it just before I came in here. Well, I think we've tracked this carol-singer to his lair. The trouble is that I shan't be here next Wednesday night to lie in wait for him."

## CHAPTER SIX

### Guests at the Chalet Dysey

“I’ll put cooks into my kitchen,  
And stewards in my hall,  
And I’ll have bakers for my bread,  
And brewers for my ale.”

*Fair Annie*

By a quarter to one, the mystery of the witching-hour singer shelved for a time, the Dysey Castle party, as Laura termed herself and the others, had reached the spot where the river flowed into the lake. Their hosts were at hand to meet them. Dame Beatrice and Laura were taken on board the boat with the auxiliary engine, which was controlled by the uncle, and Gavin and Hamish stepped into the punt and were poled upstream by the nephew.

Names were exchanged and introductions effected when the parties had disembarked, and then the guests were taken up to the chalet for cocktails.

“Heard about you,” said the older man to Dame Beatrice. “Oh, not only from this girl of yours,” he hastened to add, totally ignoring Laura’s status of wife and mother. “Was at Warwick Castle the other day. Saw your name in the Visitors’ Book—oh, it might not have been there—some other damn’ place, maybe. Asked about you.”

“That was very kind of you,” said Dame Beatrice meekly. “And as you bear the same name as that of the castle in which I am staying, it would ill become me to

suggest that Warwick Castle puts my present domicile slightly in the shade."

"Yes, Warwick does make our place look a bit on the small side," said Laura, noting that her husband and Hamish were conversing earnestly with the younger man, whose name was also Dysey. ("Call me Henry. Saves confusion," he had suggested.)

"Don't apologise," said the older Mr. Dysey, to Dame Beatrice. "Warwick's mostly fourteenth century. Modern, in fact, by Dysey standards."

"It began life as a motte and bailey, anyway," said Laura, who had decided, at her first meeting with the older man, that the best way to get on with him was to disagree with him as often and as aggressively as possible. "1068, according to Her Majesty's Stationery Office, and they ought to know. Besides, it's still got the remains of a shell keep, so where does the fourteenth century come in? And what about our Tudor house?"

"Dysey has been altered and added to, so has Warwick, of course. Don't talk through your hat, young woman! Why, just look at the residential block at Warwick!"

"Warwick was one of William the Conqueror's castles, anyway," retorted Laura. "It was contemporary, if not quite with Hastings, at least more or less with Nottingham, York, Lincoln, Cambridge, and Huntingdon. There are fourteenth-century additions, of course, and that reminds me—but never mind that now. I wonder why they hit upon the bear and the ragged staff, though, as the coat of arms? One knows about the Prince of Wales's feathers, and Talbot and his hound, but whence derives the badge of the Earls of Warwick?"

"It is said," observed Dame Beatrice, "that the first earl (if we may call him so) was named Arth or Arthgal, from the Latin *ursa*, a bear. One cannot determine whether the appellation was intended to be complimentary or the reverse, but it is likely that it was the former, since he is

reputed to have been a knight of King Arthur's Round Table. The second earl, Morvid, vanquished a giant who was armed with a torn-up tree from which he had stripped the branches, thus providing himself with 'the ragged staff.' To commemorate his victory over this ogre, Morvid added the device to his father's crest of the bear."

"I wonder how the Dysey crest and motto came about?" said Laura, looking at the bearer of the name. "I still think it's a strange one. The ravens are all right, I suppose—although a bit reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe—but I can't think what to make of the motto. *Salve Domina!* Do you know whether there was once a convent or a monastery on the site?"

"Oh, it's an old-wives' tale," said Dysey, impatiently. "The story goes that one of the Dyseys—it's a very old name, you know—took for his second wife a woman who was said to be a witch. He had a son of seventeen by his first marriage, and, according to the story, it wasn't long before the witch grew tired of the old man and tried to seduce the young 'un. When she found she couldn't—the boy was thinking of taking holy orders, or some such unlikely nonsense—she revenged herself on father and son by turning them into ravens, together with the first wife, whom she resurrected. They're said to have squawked around the village, nipping the children and terrifying everybody, until the villagers bribed a couple of the castle bowmen to shoot them. As they died they were changed back to their normal shapes and the witch had the bowmen hanged."

"And the *Salve Domina* motto?"

"The heir, a distant cousin also named Dysey, is supposed to have come to the castle and greeted the dame with those words, but they were a signal to his men to take her prisoner. He burnt her for a witch and took the ravens as his crest and the treacherous words as his motto."

"And I suppose the boy and the witch and the two bowmen take it in turns to haunt the castle! We think we've got a ghost, you know," said Laura, with an air of innocence.

"A ghost? What sort of a ghost?" He sounded startled, she thought.

"Well, he sings and he eats."

"Nonsense! Come on in and have lunch."

When lunch was over and the party were in garden chairs on the close-cut turf of the riverside garden, coffee was brought out to them by the housekeeper and, while they were drinking it, the older Dysey returned to the subject of the ghost.

"Sings and eats?" he asked. Laura scowled at him and indicated that Hamish was now with them. Dysey accepted the unspoken rebuke, nodded and, turning to the boy, said, "Like to take a trip on the river with Henry here?"

"Yes, please, if Mr. Henry Dysey doesn't mind," said Hamish, his face lighting up with pleasure.

Henry finished his coffee and raised his eyebrows at Laura, but she smiled and indicated her husband.

"Well, that's settled that, then," said Dysey, when the three had gone. "Now we can talk. Your ghost may be Tom, of course."

"Tom?" said Dame Beatrice.

"Yes. Brother of mine who bashed his silly head in, falling down the steps of that damn' tower."

"We heard something about that," said Dame Beatrice. "But, granted that the deceased may indulge in ghostly song, would he also need to sustain himself with food purloined from my larder?"

Dysey appeared to give the question close consideration.

"If it isn't Tom, then it would be Eustace," he said.

"Is Eustace still among us, I wonder?"

"Well, it's a nice point. He *was*, when I last saw him, but he's been away for some time now. Has to go when Etta lets

the castle, you see. At least, I suppose that's the way it goes."

"A man named Eustace Dysey was a patient of mine for some months after he was invalided out of the Royal Air Force at the conclusion of the last world war."

"That would be the fellow. Bats in the belfry, poor chap. Always trying to claim that the Dysey estate, such as it is, belongs to him."

"We talked about the castle when he was under my care. He seemed very proud of it, and always spoke of it as his home."

"It is his home to the extent that Tom and Etta let him live with them, but, actually, his claim is exactly the same as my own, so far as we know."

"How do you mean?" asked Laura, somewhat surprised that Dame Beatrice had not rebutted the charge that Eustace Dysey had been mentally afflicted.

"It's a silly story. Fact is, Eustace is—or was—my twin brother. How old would you say I am?"

Laura dodged this embarrassing question.

"As old as you feel, same like me, and I usually feel a fairly skittish twenty-two or so," she said.

"You do, do you? Well, I shall be fifty-one this coming November. I'll bet you thought I was twenty years older than that. Come clean. You did, didn't you, now?"

"No, I certainly did not. I did think you were a little older than you say. But," she went on, determined to get away from the subject, "if you had a twin, surely one of you, so far as the law is concerned, would be considered older than the other? I thought that when it comes to inheriting property, and so forth, the twin who was actually born first has to be considered the rightful heir."

"Ah, well, Tom, our older brother, was the heir until his death, of course, but that's where the fun begins. Nobody claims to know whether Eustace or I was born first. We got mixed up, it seems. They tied a blue ribbon on to the one of

us who was born first, and put a pink ribbon on the other—simply for convenience in telling us apart, you see—but my mother’s sister comes along and cheeps out that we’re both boys, so why have they cissied one of us up with a pink ribbon? Well, she picks us up and yells to a young housemaid, or some other stupid girl, to change the pink ribbon for a blue one, and by the time we’re both blued up and she’s put us back in our cots, she admits she may have switched us over, and she can’t say for certain which is which. So there you are. Not that it mattered until Tom took that tumble and died of it. Now it’s anybody’s guess who inherits. Depends whether the obvious heir is still alive.”

“I suppose most young babies look much alike,” said Dame Beatrice. The old man—Laura still thought of him as an old man, in spite of his self-declared age—shot a swift and suspicious glance at her, as though he suspected that there was something behind this apparently innocent observation.

“A lot less alike as they get older—even twins,” he said. “Anyway, when it comes to claiming Dysey Castle, Eustace has—or had—nothing to fear from me. Wouldn’t have the mouldering old death-trap for anything you could offer me, especially after Tom’s tumble. Something damned odd about that, you know. Always wondered whether Etta worked it. You see, between ourselves—and, as he’s dead and buried now, it don’t matter a cuss either way—there’s not much doubt Tom went to that tower to meet a woman, and, from what little I know of Etta, she isn’t the gal to stand for anything like that, house-party or no house-party, high jinks or no high jinks.”

“So there were high jinks, were there?” asked Dame Beatrice. “Setting that aside, however, it strikes me as curious that, since he was dead at the time, Thomas Dysey seems to have signed the lease for my tenancy of the castle.”

“Eh? What was that again?”



"The contract I received had been signed by someone calling himself T. H. V. Dysey—and, of course, we have this ghost who sings."

"Well, I'll go so far as to admit that a ghost might sing, but I do *not* think a ghost would eat. What's *your* opinion?" said the owner of the chalet, totally ignoring the question of the signature on the lease.

"It coincides with yours, except that I am not prepared to believe that a ghost might sing."

"Oh, I don't know so much," said Laura. "There *have* been stories—real-life ones, I mean. What about the Drummer of Tedworth and all those bell-ringing ghosts? Then it's said that the ghost of the Black Prince is sometimes accompanied by the sound of music, and what about the boy with the flute at Liphook? Then there is the organ-player in some church in Herefordshire, and that other one in a theatre in York—"

"None of them seems to have sung," Dame Beatrice pointed out. "However, no doubt Mrs. Dysey signed the agreement. You said that her name is Etta, shortened, no doubt, from Henrietta, and H. is the second initial of the signature. Tell us more about the house-party, Mr. Dysey."

"Don't know that there's any more to tell. No idea who Tom was likely to date up in the small hours, if that's what you mean. Hadn't noticed any goings-on—not that I should. Not my line, that kind of thing. Never had much time for women—not that I'd blame any man for wanting a change from Etta. Don't know why she couldn't use her full name. Henrietta's all right. Dignified, old-fashioned sort of name. Etta's like something out of one of those idiotic novelettes women used to read in my young days. Henry's called after her, but I don't suppose she wants to remember that. The *Etta* business came about because of it, I shouldn't wonder."

Neither of the ladies cared to comment upon this indication of a pre-nuptial escapade on the part of Mrs. Dysey, and Laura went on with the previous subject.

“Were there many guests?” she asked. “At the house-party, I mean.”

“Depends what you call ‘many.’ There were Tom and Etta, me, Eustace, Binns (who’s a doctor), Mrs. Binns, the vicar and his wife—over from Ravens Dysey, you know—and a couple of second cousins of some sort—goodness knows where Etta dug *them* up—silly girls, giggled most of the time. No young men there for them to flirt with, I suppose. Oh, and the Chief Constable and his wife were invited, but did not accept.”

“How convenient,” Dame Beatrice remarked.

“Eh? I don’t follow you.” Again he turned his suspicious glance on her and then on Laura.

“I beg your pardon. I was thinking aloud,” said Dame Beatrice.

“Bad habit. Might land you in trouble. Talk in your sleep?”

“I really have no idea. My husbands were too kind to remark upon it if I did, but unfortunately their testimony, one way or the other, is no longer available to us.”

“Oh, a widow, are you?”

“Thrice.”

“Well, you look pretty well on it. What d’you do? Poison ‘em off?”

“No, neither did they commit suicide, oddly enough.”

To Laura’s relief—although she had a feeling that Dame Beatrice, who took a beautifully detached view of life in general, and of the eccentricities of most of her acquaintances in particular, was enjoying the outrageous conversation—the boat now came chugging back to the landing-stage and its occupants stepped ashore.

“I must have an outboard engine fitted to my pram dinghy,” said Hamish, coming up to his mother, “as soon as I can afford it. A one-to-two h.p., you know. Mr. Henry says you don’t want to over-power your craft. His is a four-horse, but then his dinghy is a great deal bigger than mine.

Sometimes he sails her, and then she's almost a yacht. Oh, and he's promised to let me be in control of her after tea, when we take her out again."

"We're not staying to tea," said Laura.

"Not? But, mamma, we've been invited! Mr. Henry says his housekeeper has been cooking cakes and making savouries all the afternoon."

"Of course you're invited. Took it for granted," said the older Dysey. "Can't disappoint my housekeeper. Of course you're invited, young fellow, and if Mrs. Dysey's cooking doesn't give you nightmare, nothing will. Go along to the kitchen with Henry, and see what she's up to. You may be given a taste or two—who knows?—but don't eat too much and spoil your tea."

"Right. Thanks awfully! Being on the water makes you hungry, doesn't it?" said Hamish. He went with Henry to the chalet.

"Nice little lad. You two his mother and father?" asked Mr. Dysey, as Gavin sat on the grass beside his wife's chair.

"So we have always believed," Gavin replied.

"Just thought I'd ask. Henry's a fly-by-night, you see. Wrong side of the blanket. Adopted him when he was three. Henry thinks I'm his father, but I ain't—oh, not by a long chalk. Swore my housekeeper to eternal secrecy. Price of her silence was to marry her. Haven't regretted it. She knows her place and keeps to it. Henry thinks she's my second wife and that his own mother is dead."

"Then why does he call you his uncle?" demanded Laura, who felt that Dysey could scarcely expect to be the monopolist of embarrassing questions.

"Eh? Oh, that's his idea of fun. Come on. Time for tea." He got up, offered (surprisingly) a gallant hand to Dame Beatrice to help her out of her deckchair, and escorted her across the lawn. Gavin jumped up, gave Laura a kiss, which she promptly rubbed off, and said,

"Something a trifle odd about that bird. I entirely agree with your summing-up of him. He's far too informative. What did he talk about before I happened along?"

"Goodness knows! I think he's mad," said Laura, "and he was horribly rude to Mrs. Croc. And you're not to take mean advantages when I'm in a deckchair and can't fend you off."

"Beg pardon. Yes, that swan over there does seem to wear a slightly disapproving look. Come on. Somebody mentioned tea."

"By the way," said Laura, as they walked towards the chalet, "this older brother who was killed. You've made it clear that the police suspected murder, but what was the verdict at the inquest?"

"Death by Misadventure. Although impoverished, the Dyseys, it seems, are still an important family hereabouts, and I suppose a local jury weren't going to stick their necks out further than they could help. Incidentally, your idea that our Mrs. Dysey is staying here doesn't seem to work out."

"No. The so-called housekeeper certainly isn't *our* Mrs. Dysey."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Internal Evidence

"An earthly nourrice sits and sings,  
And aye she sings, 'Ba, lily wean!  
Little ken I my bairn's father,  
Far less the land that he staps in."

*The Great Silkie of Sule Skerrie*

The following day was Saturday, and Gavin had decided to spend most of the morning in a complete exploration of the castle, leaving an equally painstaking survey of the house until the servants had gone off for the afternoon and evening. He was to leave early enough on Monday morning to reach his Scotland Yard office at ten. Jonathan and Deborah, with Jonathan driving, and the chauffeur George, bringing Dame Beatrice's car, were due to arrive at the castle in time for tea. Jonathan was coming by way of Evesham and Warwick, George direct from London.

"Very satisfactory," commented Gavin, when, on the Saturday morning, he received the news of these arrivals. "So long as Jon is here, I shan't lose any sleep."

Having said this, and meant it, he went off on his tour of inspection. He began it at the gatehouse. If only he had had another man at his disposal, he would have suggested that they should tour the walls and the flanking towers in opposite directions. By this means, any lurking trespasser must have been caught.

The gatehouse at Dysey Castle was of simple pattern, consisting of two sturdy towers each with its spiral staircase. These towers were joined above the archway by a small square chamber which had been the porter's room. It could be entered from one of the towers, but not from the other, as it had only one doorway. The newel staircase in the "blind" tower was continued upwards, however, and led to an archway opening on to the battlements, so that it was possible to make a complete circuit of the outer defences.

With this in mind, Gavin walked out on to the parapet of the curtain walls and began his tour. He went slowly, and subjected every yard of the way to a keen scrutiny. In one of the embrasures of the crenellation between two merlons he noticed a piece of paper. On going forward to inspect it, he saw that it was a pound note affixed to the stonework by a lavish amount of chewing gum. He left it where it was and continued his tour, but there was nothing else of note and he did not mention his find to the others until he returned from depositing the servants at the bus stop after lunch.

"I shall wait up tonight," he told Dame Beatrice, "and see whether I can catch the blighter red-handed. I suppose it's pretty obvious who he is, but he can't make free of our premises, even if he *is* prepared to pay for the food he takes from our larder."

"You mean he is my ex-patient," said Dame Beatrice. "It is likely enough. I wonder what his object is in haunting the castle like this?"

"That's what I mean to find out. It's a very odd way to behave, look at it how you will, unless he's suffered a relapse since you had him, and has gone off his head."

"I should wish to join you in your vigil tonight. If it *is* Eustace Dysey, I shall be the best person to question him, since I know him already and can identify him for you."

"Right. I shall have to tell Laura what we're doing, and instruct her to stay in charge of Hamish and the servants. She won't be very pleased. She's a spirited lass and loves a

spice of adventure. Well, now, I'll take a good look round the house, and then I'll take her and Hamish for a drive, if you feel you can cope with the visitors this afternoon."

The house yielded nothing of note, and he drove off with his wife and son, leaving Dame Beatrice at the receipt of custom in the gatehouse archway. She had taken with her an ancient leather-covered volume, a diary kept by a Dysey of the eighteenth century. It had been pounced upon, early in their tenancy of the castle, by Hamish, but the difficult, crabbed writing, eccentric spelling and quill penmanship of the diarist had soon defeated the little boy, so Dame Beatrice had been spending time copying out the more interesting items, which Laura had then typed so that her son could enjoy them.

Dame Beatrice was reading and copying one of these extracts when the first of the visitors turned up, a middle-aged woman on a bicycle. Dame Beatrice put a bookmark to keep her place in the diary, and greeted the newcomer with a welcoming leer. She had a feeling that she had seen her, or someone very like her, before.

"Half-a-crown?" said the woman. "It seems rather a lot, and, in any case, I am a member of the National Trust, and should come in free of charge."

"I am sorry to say that we are not connected with the National Trust. This is private property," said Dame Beatrice equably. "If you do not wish to pay, you can get quite a good view of the fortifications by walking round the outside of the curtain walls."

"Oh, but I'm psychic," said the woman. "I can achieve a perfect *rapport*. This place is haunted, of course. Which is the Bloody Tower?" She removed a shabby handbag from the handlebars of her machine and counted out a shilling, two sixpences, a three-penny piece, and three pennies and deposited these in the pudding-basin which did duty as a toll-dish.

"You would like me to show you the Tudor house first," suggested Dame Beatrice, "and then you will be at liberty to explore the rest of the buildings for yourself."

"You mean I may go round on my own?"

"Certainly. Come this way, please."

"But where did the murder take place?"

"I do not know of any murder, but I believe a body was found at the foot of that central tower beyond the kitchen garden."

"Are there emanations?"

"I should be sorry to think so, but I am afraid I am not skilled in such matters."

"Training and technique make a difference, of course. I studied in Vienna before the war. Scultzmänn, you know."

Dame Beatrice did *not* know, but she nodded briskly, said, "Really? How interesting," and led the way into the house. By the time the woman had come out again into the courtyard, a Women's Voluntary Services contingent had rolled up in a motor-coach, and two cars were waiting behind it. Dame Beatrice directed the motor-coach on to the grass verge and, mindful of the principle established so successfully by Hamish, mulcted the car drivers of a shilling each and advised them to park in the courtyard.

By the time she had dealt with the new arrivals, the bicycle and, presumably, its owner, had disappeared. Dame Beatrice had left the Visitors' Book open on the small table in the gatehouse entrance, and went over to it to find out whether the pupil of Herr Scultzmänn had signed her name. There it was—Henrietta Dysey. Dame Beatrice waited until the coach-party were beginning to trickle back and take their seats in their vehicle, and then she went into the house and took the signed lease out of a drawer. The signature, with its three bold initials, was in entirely different writing from that of the Henrietta Dysey in the Visitors' Book, and, in any case, the woman on the bicycle did not in any way (except in general shabbiness) resemble the



châtelaine of Dysey Castle, although she certainly resembled someone.

Dame Beatrice emptied the pudding-basin of its respectable cargo of half-crowns and other coins, checked the amount, and carried the money into the house. Then she returned to her post, noted that underneath Henrietta Dysey's signature there appeared another entry, "W.V.S. Party led by Lilian Calder (Mrs.)," and two more marked "P. H. and Mrs. Rush," and "Thomas Pierce and wife," and then she sat down to the eighteenth-century diary. She waved a yellow claw in response to the fluttering hands of the W.V.S. members, and watched the coach back and turn, before she settled down to her studies. The people who had come in the two cars removed themselves unobtrusively, and nobody else turned up at all. At four o'clock Zena the kitchenmaid abandoned her novelette and brought out tea and thin bread-and-butter, a chore which she had wished on herself in gratitude for a kindly hearing of her troubles. At six o'clock she and Dame Beatrice carried the gatehouse paraphernalia indoors and Dame Beatrice resumed work on the diary in her own room. Gavin, Laura, and Hamish returned to the castle at seven.

After the evening meal of cold consommé, ham, tongue, salad, a sherry trifle, and cheese, Gavin announced his intention of perambulating the curtain walls again before dark. He returned with a ten-shilling note, two half-crowns, a florin, and six pennies, and told Dame Beatrice that the pound note had gone (although much of the chewing-gum remained) and that the seventeen shillings and sixpence had been left on the floor, the ten-shilling note anchored by the other coins.

"That must be Henrietta Dysey," commented Dame Beatrice. "She objected strongly to paying for admission, and has reimbursed herself."

"Must be *who*?" demanded Laura. "You don't mean the Mrs. Dysey who let us the castle?"

“No, I do not, but this woman signed the Visitors’ Book in that name, so I imagine she is entitled to it. I shall take pleasure in describing her to the Dyseys at the riverside chalet to see whether they can tell us more about her. The Clan Dysey appears to be a large one. Moreover, this woman reminded me strongly of someone I have seen before.”

Hamish went to bed without fuss (as usual) at half-past eight, and at ten minutes to ten Laura drove to the bus stop to pick up the three servants in Gavin’s car. Dame Beatrice and Gavin walked out to the gatehouse and carried folding chairs and rugs up the newel stair to the porter’s room to keep watch. Every ten minutes or so, one or other of them stepped out into the open to look and to listen, but there was no sound of singing. At six o’clock on the Sunday morning they went back to the house for breakfast and then retired to bed until lunch at half-past one. No food had disappeared from the larder. Laura, who never needed much sleep, had prowled about in the kitchen regions for the better part of the night, and reported that she had seen and heard nobody.

“I take it that the pound note was our friend’s farewell gesture,” said Gavin, “but I’m just as glad Jon’s coming, all the same.”

Half-way through the afternoon, Dysey and Henry turned up. They gave no explanation of their visit, stayed to tea and, when tea was over and the evening had advanced almost to sunset, still gave no indication of departure.

“What’s the idea?” muttered Gavin, as he passed Dame Beatrice’s chair on his way to the sideboard for drinks. She shrugged her thin shoulders and addressed Dysey.

“I think I had a visit from a relative of yours when I was in charge of the castle yesterday,” she said. “You may recognise the signature.” She produced the Visitors’ Book and handed it to him. “Can there be two people named Henrietta Dysey? This was a tall, thin, brown-haired (died, I

think) woman who came on a bicycle and claimed to be a member of the National Trust. Can you place her?"

Father and son—or uncle and nephew, as the case might be—exchanged glances. Both shook their heads.

"There's only one Henrietta Dysey that I know of," said the older man. "And, talking of the Dysey women, you'd better get back, Henry, when you've downed your grog, and see what ours is up to. You know she hates to be alone in the place after dark."

"What about both of us going back, then?" suggested Henry.

"No, no. You'll be much quicker walking by yourself. I can come on a bit later at my own pace. Off with you, or the poor creature will be sitting on the kitchen floor with her apron pulled over her head."

Henry grinned, finished his drink, accepted a second one and, a little later, rose to go. Gavin saw him to the door. Henry said, in a low voice,

"I expect that woman was my mother, but, of course, I don't know. I don't know who I am, and that's a fact. But the old man recognised the description all right, I could tell that. Wonder what she came for?"

"To remove a pound note and leave seventeen and six, apparently," said Gavin, but he did not satisfy Henry's curiosity by enlarging on this remark. He shut the front door and went back to the others. Dysey turned to him.

"What poppycock has Henry been treating you to?" he demanded.

"I don't think he treated me to any," Gavin replied.

"What had you in mind that he might say?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. He's a strange boy. You don't want to take too much notice of him."

Hamish, bored with the company, whose conversation had been anything but enlivening, had taken himself to his room half an hour earlier than usual. He now appeared in the doorway in pyjamas, dressing-gown, and slippers, and

made masterful signs to his father to join him. Gavin got up at once, aware that something important to Hamish was in the wind. Hamish closed the door behind the pair of them and drew his father away from it.

"I say," he said, "there's somebody flashing a torch or something from that tower opposite the one at the end of the kitchen garden. I thought, when I heard the front door being shut, that the Dyseys had gone, so I sneaked to the window at the top of the main staircase to make sure, but it was only one of them, and then, a minute or two later, I saw this light. Whoever was flashing it must have been crouching right down, because I couldn't see anybody."

"Right. Nip back to the staircase window and keep watch," said Gavin. "I'll go out and have a look-see. Some lunatic fooling about up there, I expect. I'll send him off with a flea in his ear."

He knew that Hamish would obey orders and remain on watch, out of harm's way, at the staircase window, so he did not even wait for the child to mount the stairs, but went straight out by the front door and ran lightly across the courtyard to the flanking tower. It was one of the two which had a newel staircase. There was no door to bar the entrance, so Gavin, holding on to the guide-rope which did duty as a handrail, mounted as quickly and quietly as he could to the battlements. There was no one else on the stairs, and, at first, he thought that there was no one on the walls, either, until he saw a dark figure silhouetted against the sky near the tower opposite the one by whose stair he had mounted to the battlements. He called out sharply,

"What are you doing?"

"Hullo!" came the response. "I'm looking for Uncle Eustace."

It was Henry Dysey's voice. Gavin made his way round to him.

"What on earth...? I thought you'd gone home," he said.

"Sorry," said Henry. "I was sure I'd spotted somebody up here, and, if so, I guessed I'd better investigate and report back. Merely intended as a neighbourly action."

"Well, look," said Gavin, "if anybody is up here, it's my business, not yours, I think, so, if you'll excuse an inhospitable slogan, kindly push off and leave all intruders to me. I assure you that I am capable of taking care of them."

"Sorry," said Henry again. "Righto, I'll sling my hook. And you'd better chuck my uncle out, too. He'll stay all night if you'll let him. Cheerio, then. Be seeing you."

Gavin let him go first down the narrow, treacherous stair and then followed him. He watched him emerge from the gatehouse into the luminous night, and remained where he was for a good ten minutes to make certain that Henry did not come back. Then he returned to the house to find Dysey getting ready to leave. He saw him off and went upstairs to where Hamish was still at the post of duty.

"It was only Henry Dysey," he said to the boy. "They've both gone now. You'd better get back to kip. I hope you're not cold?"

"Not a bit, thank you," said Hamish. "Good night, father. I'm sorry you've got to go back to London."

"Yes, so am I," said Gavin. "But you'll have Mr. Bradley and his wife."

"They let me call them Jonathan and Deborah."

"Congratulations. Goodnight. Sleep well."

He saw the boy back to bed, tucked him in, and went down to the two women.

"What was Hamish being so mysterious about?" asked Laura.

"Chap on the battlements. Turned out to be Henry Dysey. Claimed he'd spotted someone up there, and thought it might be Eustace. I chased him off with a few winged words. He apologised, but I didn't like it much. I wonder whether it wouldn't be a good idea to drop that couple, if

you can manage it. There's something about them that I don't altogether like. They're damned mysterious and they've got too many relatives. Do you think you can cheese them off, Dame B.?"

"I am not sure that I want to drop them altogether," said Dame Beatrice, "but we will see how things turn out. We can scarcely avoid the acquaintance (now that we have made it) without appearing discourteous, but a little slackening of the ties will be just as well, perhaps."

"One thing, old Jon can be relied on for a spot of terseness if he doesn't like them," said Gavin. "Come on, Laura, let's go to bed. It may be many a long day before that busy old fool, unruly sun, finds us together on the connubial couch again."

"I wonder whose son Henry Dysey really is?" said Laura.

"That may transpire in due course. Meanwhile, Dame B. has remembered of whom the woman on the bicycle reminded her."

"The one who whipped the pound note and signed herself Henrietta Dysey?"

"The same. Dame B. says she must be the sister, or some other close relative, of Mr. Cyril Dysey's housekeeper-wife."

"Whoever she is, she's bats in the belfry, if you ask me," said Laura.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Gardener Talks

“O dinna ye see that bonny castell,  
Wi’ halls and towers sae fair?  
Gin ilka man had back his ain,  
Of it you suld be heir.”

*Fause Foodrage*

Laura was up early on the following morning to have breakfast with her husband before seeing him off to London.

“What do you really think Henry was doing on the battlements last night?” she asked.

“Probably just what he said. He spotted somebody up there, and I fancy he had a pretty good idea who it was.”

“Eustace, you mean. I wonder whether *he* killed the man whose body was found at the foot of that tower? All these rumours we’ve been hearing mean people think it was a murder, whatever the verdict was at the inquest. All the same, couldn’t it have been an accident? It must be quite easy to miss your footing on one of those newel staircases.”

“That’s as may be. I saw the police photographs of the body, you know. They were pretty grim.”

“But if he’d fallen from top to bottom?”

“I don’t think it could be done on a winding stair. On an ordinary straight staircase, of course, it’s quite easy to cascade right the way down, and end up with a broken neck, but on a newel stair it seems to me that you could only fall just so far before you crashed against the side and blocked

the thing with your body. This chap Tom Dysey was found right at the foot of the tower, remember.”

“Somebody may have coshed him when he was almost at the bottom, I suppose.”

“The multiple injuries didn’t suggest that. According to the police, they were more consistent with his having fallen from a considerable height. The chaps I’ve spoken to at the local headquarters are sure it was either suicide or murder.”

“I wish Mrs. Croc. could get hold of a copy of the medical evidence. I wonder (if it *was* murder) which day of the week he would have died?”

‘How do you mean?’

“Well, apparently Mrs. Dysey was under suspicion for a time, and that might apply to the rest of the house-party, but there’s this business of throwing open the castle on Wednesdays and Saturdays, isn’t there? That means that almost anybody could have killed him.”

“I take your point, but I think it’s a doubtful one. There doesn’t seem much doubt that the victim had a definite assignation with someone. That note the police found—”

“Yes, but the meeting could have been with someone who was not a member of the house-party and who had to be *incognito*—someone who came in by paying his half-crown and then simply lurked until it was time to meet this Tom Dysey. I think Mrs. Dysey is all mixed up in it, mind you. She led us to suppose that her husband was still alive when we booked up to take the place for three months, and, apart from that, she told us that her lease included this condition of opening the castle to visitors.”

“What about it? Lots of old places have these clauses.”

“Not if the property has belonged to the family for generations. There’s no question of a lease where Dysey Castle is concerned, except for birds of passage such as ourselves. It isn’t even as if Mrs. Dysey pockets the half-crowns which we collect. She said specifically that we could keep them.”



"Yes, I see what you mean. Oh, well, I'd better be off. They're on the telephone at the home farm. Ring me up from there and let me know when Jon and Deborah arrive."

"After lunch," said Laura, when her husband had gone, and Dame Beatrice and Hamish had had breakfast, "I want to try a little experiment."

"Will you need help, mamma?" asked Hamish. "I ask only because I'd thought of going over to the home farm this morning and I've been invited to stay for lunch. They're having pig's fry."

"No, I don't need any help," his mother replied. "Stay over there as long as you like, except after dark, of course."

"Right. Thank you. I'll be off, then." He buckled on a fearsome-looking sheath-knife, picked up the shepherd's thumb-stick which the farmer's son had given him, and went away. Laura watched him as far as the gatehouse and then turned again to Dame Beatrice.

"Now I can get cracking," she said.

"Do you wish to have a witness of your experiment, or would you prefer to 'go it alone,' as I believe the expression to be?" enquired her employer.

"Oh, would you really come and watch? I'd be ever so glad if you would. I'll go and talk to the gardener, then, and let you know when I'm ready."

The gardener was in the kitchen garden arguing with—or, rather, laying down the law to—the cook.

"My stick-beans," he croaked, "got to be allowed to mature. *You* picks 'em before they got any body nor any length to 'em, not to speak of no goodness nor no fattenin' of what's inside the pods."

"Ladies likes their food young," protested the cook.

"So does cannibals," retorted the gardener. "Which is not to say as they should be indulged. There's them," he went on, "as likes to eat sucking pig, but where's the

Christianity in that? Sucking pigs ain't 'ad no sort of a chance at all if they're going to get ate before they're out of the cradle, as you might say. Now I arsts you, is that morl? Is that honourable? Is that what we're put 'ere on this sinful earth to do—to pick off onripe beans and sucking pigs before they've 'ad a chance to develop theirselves? It bloomin' well ain't fair."

"Seem' they'll be ate in the end, anyway, I don't see it matters. Ladies likes young veg," persisted the cook, worsted in the conflict, but with her hat still in the ring. "Why, some of them foreign restaurongs up to London even whittles down their old potatoes to make 'em look like noo 'uns."

"Foreigners will do anythink," said the gardener austerely, "but that ain't the British way of life. To my mind, the only spring onions—so-called, them still being sold be the shops in August—should be the thinnin's out. Ah, the thinnin's out, *and no more*. Onions, same as stick-beans and sucking pigs and anythink else you might care to mention, did ought to be allowed to mature. 'Ow would *you* like it," he thundered, "if you was a nimmature stick-bean or a sucking pig or a spring onion, to be cut off..."

"In the flower of your youth?" said Laura, whom, up to that point, the adversaries had either not noticed or had ignored. The cook, obviously glad to be relieved of the responsibility of keeping up her end of the argument, asked hopefully,

"Did you want me, madam?"

"Not you, Mrs. Noakes. I want Bellairs. Bellairs, I need a large sack—the largest possible sack—stuffed tightly with straw. Can you lay your hands on such a thing? Don't bother, if you can't. Anyway, I don't want it until after lunch."

She realised that the belligerent Bellairs would be unlikely, in his present mood, to refuse a challenge in the presence of Mrs. Noakes.

"I don't know but what I couldn't oblige, mam," he said, "if you'll just let me know 'ow big a sack. And you bear in mind what I been a-tellin' of you about my stick-beans," he added fiercely to the cook before he turned away. "That cook!" he confided to Laura, as they walked towards the bottom of the kitchen garden and made for the flanking tower there. "I tells you, Mrs. Gavin, mam, as she ain't no more of a cook nor what I am."

"She does pretty well," said Laura. "What makes you say she isn't a cook?"

"'Cos she's a waitress down to Warwick. Only come 'ere while the 'ouse was let."

"Has she ever been here before?"

"No, course she 'ain't. They're all noo 'ere. Advertised for, they be. Cook, parlourmaid, 'ousemaid, kitchenmaid. It's like a kind of an 'oliday for 'em, you see—what's more, an 'oliday with pay. Some on 'em makes for the seaside 'otels and some on 'em makes for 'ere, and likewise for other places as needs servants."

"Oh, I see. But surely they don't take three months' holiday a year?"

"No, course not. They gets a paid week from their last employment, and that's their lot, but, of course, they does pretty well on their 'oliday money."

"But—don't they get the sack when they try to go back to their job, if they stay here the whole three months?"

"No, course they don't. On'y too glad to get 'em back, I reckon. If not, there's plenty other jobs as they can go to. Dermestic staff such as waitresses and chambermaids, 'specially in town 'otels, why, they're like gold, Mrs. Gavin, mam. You just can't get 'em."

"So what happens when the castle is no longer let for holidays?—during the winter, for example. What does Mrs. Dysey do then?"

"Her manages on 'er own with a woman from the village what is also employed on the 'ome farm, and even 'er on'y

comes 'ere twice a week for a couple of hours, and, what's more, 'er wouldn't come at all assept 'er's—well, *you* know." He tapped his forehead. "Otherwise, well, Mrs. Dysey, she manages."

"But you're permanently employed here, I take it?"

"Ah. It kind o'suits me, this place do. What's more, me wages is right. I knows too much, you see." They arrived at the foot of the tower. "Used to keep me kit and tools in 'ere. That's 'ow I come to find 'im," the gardener added. "Well, now, about this sack of yourn. I ain't got one on the premises, as you might say, but I can get you one, like what I promised. 'Ow big a one did you want?"

"The biggest sack possible, and tightly stuffed with straw," said Laura. She returned to Dame Beatrice.

"News!" she announced. "I've just had a bit of the low-down from the gardener." She recounted what she had heard.

"Interesting," remarked Dame Beatrice. "So the servants are birds of passage."

"Mrs. Dysey can't be very well off, if she can only afford a halfwitted char and a gardener. What do you make of the gardener's remark that his wages are right?"

"But little. Naturally the place would have to be kept in order, in view of the summer lettings."

"Well, yes, I suppose so, but, of course, he *was* the one who found the body, and he *did* say that he knew too much."

"You are suggesting?"

"I wondered whether a spot of blackmail might not be indicated—on his part, I mean."

"There *is* that aspect of the matter. On the other hand, if he really is blackmailing Mrs. Dysey, it was rather a dangerous remark to make, was it not? I should suppose that he made it merely to impress you. Naturally, as the one who found the body, he would consider himself to be a

person of importance. Having gone so far this morning, he may be inclined to tell us a little more. Upon the propriety or otherwise of gossiping with servants I make, at this juncture, no comment, because I shall be more than interested in anything which Bellairs may see fit to disclose."

"Yes, we could bear to be better informed about the history and general ramifications of the Dysey family," said Laura, "so, if he decides to natter, I shall give him his head. My permutations and combinations with a straw-stuffed sack should encourage him, I feel. I only wish it could be stuffed with something heavier, but, short of climbing into it myself, I don't know what else to use that wouldn't simply bust the sacking. Of course, Gavin's right. You *couldn't* fall from top to bottom of a spiral staircase, but we may as well put it to the proof."

Laura and Dame Beatrice were having coffee after lunch when Bellairs knocked at the back door and conveyed to the kitchenmaid the news that the sack was stuffed and ready, and that he would await Mrs. Gavin's further instructions.

With difficulty he and Laura, between them, got the sack to the top of the tower.

"Be a sight easier, Mrs. Gavin, mam, if us could have rigged up a pulley and taken it up outside of the walls," observed the gardener.

Laura agreed, but they had it in position at last, and then, at her request, Bellairs descended to the courtyard and stood beside Dame Beatrice at the foot of the tower. Laura gave the sack an Amazonian push. It slithered to the first bend, bit the wall, rebounded slightly and then slumped itself across the steps, entirely blocking the way. Laura was perspiring freely and full of strange oaths by the time she had tried the experiment twice more, and then had manhandled the sack down the winding stair to the entrance to the tower.

"Ah," said the gardener, "I see now as to why you was wanting the sack. But it weren't done that way, mam. It stands to reason. You couldn't fall top to bottom of them twisty old steps, no matter 'ow 'ard you might try."

"So I perceive. I needn't have bothered," said Laura. "Incidentally, that last couple of stairs seem a bit different from the rest. They don't *look* any different, but—"

"They're made of oak, painted to look like stone, mam. Some sort of repairs job, but done long afore my time."

"Yes, I felt they were different. Oh, well, blow my silly experiment! Still, I thought it might be worth a trial."

"Not if you'd of told me what you wanted the sack for, mam. A dreadful state 'e was in when I found 'im. Looked more like he'd fell from a sky-scraper than just been pushed down a couple of them stairs. I've never seen nothing like it, no, nor wouldn't wish for to do so again. It was all of a queer do, was that death. There was the police ferretin' round, and talk, so I 'eard, of callin' in Scotland Yard, but that never come to nothink, that didn't, and, come the finish, nothink wasn't done."

"Why not, I wonder?" said Laura, after Dame Beatrice, conscious that her presence might limit the gardener's flow, had walked back into the house.

"Well, you see, it was a bit chancy like, I reckon, being that the vicar and 'is lady and the doctor and 'is lady was among the guests. You couldn't 'ardly arst *them* what they was up to at after midnight, and, if you couldn't arst *them*, well, it was a bit orkard arstin' of the rest of the party, I s'pose. Anyway, it all come to nothink—just one more of the myst'ries of 'ist'ry, as you might say."

"There seem to be a fair number of the Dysey family living around these parts," said Laura.

"Ah, and one as properly you don't know nothink about."

"Really? We have met the two who live by the river, of course."

"Ah, them, yes. Mr. Cyril and Mr. Henry. Mr. Cyril was 'ere that night, o' course, along of them as I mentioned, and two very flighty young ladies, nieces or second cousins, or somethink o' that. They come from London or somewhere, I reckon, considerin' the way they carried on. Then there was Mr. Eustace, as lived 'ere. The ones as wasn't 'ere was Mr. 'Enry and, o' course, the son of the 'ouse, Mr. Bonamy."

"You mentioned one of the Dyseys whom I don't know. Which would that be?"

"Why, John Carter, 'im down there at the 'ome farm, where I lodges."

"And does *he* have a claim to the castle?"

"I dunno for sure. I 'eard tell as the old lady was a Dysey, but you don't go arstin' *'im* questions. 'E'll smile quite amiable-like, but 'e won't tell you nothink without 'e's a mind to. That's John Carter for you. Anyway, 'is old mother was a Dysey. It 'ud all be in the 'ands of the family bloodsuckers, I dare say. Keep away from the law is my motter. It's like bettin' on the 'orses—you can't win."

"Is it true that two of the Dyseys are twin brothers?"

"Ah, it is, and a queer old story, too. Seem they got mixed up at birth, and now nobody can't say whether Mr. Eustace or Mr. Cyril—that's 'im by the river—is the older twin."

"So Mr. Dysey himself told us, but it seems that it does not really matter, as he makes no claim to the family property."

"Oh, don't 'e, though? You don't need to berlieve everythink 'e tells you, Mrs. Gavin, mam. Ho, no! And what every old woman in these parts 'ud like to know is 'oo is Mr. 'Enry's father, and why did Mr. Cyril marry quite sudden, and 'er nothink but 'is own 'ousekeeper, Carrie Slepe as was, from over Warwick way. Just afore Mr. Tom's death 'e married 'er. Now what were the meanin' o' that? Ah, there's deep callin' to deep, and still waters a-runnin' likewise, in these old fam'lies, Mrs. Gavin, mam, you mark my words."

“Who is the woman—related, I rather think, to Mrs. Cyril Dysey—who calls herself Henrietta?”

“Oh, ’er! Old Mr. Dysey took a bit of a fancy to ’er—Mr. Tom’s father, you know—and ’ad ’er sort of eddicated. Personal, I don’t believe in eddicatin’ people above their station. It on’y gives ’em ideas and goes to their ’eads.” He tapped his own significantly.



## CHAPTER NINE

### Alas, poor Yorick!

“There were three ravens sat in a tree,  
They were as black as they might be.  
The one of them said to his make,  
‘Where shall we our breakfast take?’”

*The Three Ravens*

Jonathan, Deborah, and their dog arrived in time for tea, and Cyril and Henry Dysey turned up a quarter of an hour later. Hamish was still at the home farm, and George, Dame Beatrice’s man, had been at the castle with her car since three o’clock.

“We called to ask whether the Chief would care for an evening’s fishing,” said the younger Dysey.

“Very kind indeed of you,” said Laura, “but my husband has been recalled to London. He went off early this morning.”

Introductions were made, and Dame Beatrice dispensed tea to her augmented circle of guests. At six the last two of these departed to take advantage of the evening rise. Laura sped them with good wishes and insincere regrets, and returned to the others with the remark that the more often she saw the Dyseys, one and all, the less she liked them. After tea, Dame Beatrice again had described the Henrietta Dysey who had visited the castle by bicycle, but both Cyril and Henry again asserted that they knew of only one

Henrietta Dysey, and that she was always called Etta. It was at this point that they elected to take their departure.

"Of course, they may be telling the truth, and they may not," said Laura, when, the Dyseys having left, the matter was discussed. "I wouldn't care to bet on it either way. Now, while you and Deb take your back hair down and exchange reminiscences of the good old days when we were all girls together at Cartaret College, Jon and I will walk Perry Mason over to the home farm, telephone Gavin, and fish Hamish back to have his supper. All right by you, Jon?"

The saturnine, dark, tall man announced his willingness to accompany her, whistled up the bloodhound and they set out to take the mildly up-and-down-hill track south-west of the castle to where the home farm occupied some productive acres of a broad but shallow valley. The place was still known as the home farm, although a former Dysey, so Laura had learned from Bellairs, had given it as a marriage portion to the daughter who had become old Mrs. Carter. As he and Laura strode away from the castle gatehouse and took the path up the hill, Jonathan observed, "I should say that Robert was in a flap when he sent me that S.O.S. to come here and take over from him. What's the story?"

Laura told it him, finishing as they reached the crest of the rounded hill and stood for a moment to look down upon the farm buildings.

"I see," said Jonathan. "How does Aunt Adela react?"

"I don't really know. You can never tell with her."

"And you?"

"I'd like to know the ins and outs, of course, and I shall be rather glad when the end of next week comes, and Hamish goes off to foreign parts with his school."

"I shall snoop round tonight."

"I don't think there will be anything doing. Our mysterious visitor only turns up on Wednesday and, possibly, Sunday nights, we think, and he didn't come this

Sunday, anyway, and seems to have left us some money to pay for his keep. It's a bit spooky, actually, although I wouldn't mind so much if it weren't for Hamish. I don't want *him* seeing things!"

"Does he show any sign of nerves?—not that I can imagine it."

"No, he's as fit and lively as ever, but I don't like mysteries, and this visitor *is* mysterious. What do you suppose can be his object in haunting the place?"

"From what you've told me, I think he must be one of the Dyseys. He may be hanging about in the hope of finding some evidence in support of a claim to the property. 'He' may even be this somewhat odd woman who calls herself Henrietta Dysey."

"Yes, and that kind of evidence could only be found in the form of a will, or something of that sort, and any kind of document would be in the house itself. That's what I don't much like—the thought that he gets into the house at night."

"It isn't just a thought, though, is it? If he steals food from the larder, he *must* get into the house, unless one of the servants is in collusion with him, and slips him the grub when everybody else is asleep."

Laura explained how unlikely it was that he had an ally among the servants, who were merely birds of passage. Jonathan said nothing more until they reached the end of the winding, downhill path which led them to the farmyard gate. Then he asked,

"Why don't you get the windows fixed? And what about bolts on the doors?"

"I don't think we can tinker about, as we're such very temporary tenants. The house and castle are by way of being an ancient monument, you see. Anyway, there *are* bolts on the doors."

"Well, Robert has asked me to keep an eye lifting, and I'll certainly do that. It doesn't look as though the thief has

the intention to do you any harm other than to snatch some of your food, that's one reassuring thing."

"It was a bit suspicious, that business of Gavin's finding Henry Dysey snooping around the fortifications, don't you think?"

"Not knowing Henry Dysey except for the brief, unexciting meeting with him at tea today, I can't put forward an opinion. He's hardly likely to be our man if he's got a home close at hand, with an uncle and a housekeeper laid on, surely, because that means, presumably, that he has food for the asking, you know."

"Yes, I see that, but stealing the food might be merely a blind, so that we don't suspect him of being the uninvited visitor. After all, he may think he has a claim to the estate, being a Dysey, I suppose, although there seems to be some sort of mystery about his parentage."

Hamish appeared, accompanied by a young man in rough clothes and wearing gum-boots. Hamish hailed Laura and introduced his companion.

"This is Mr. Jerry Carter. His father owns the farm. Come and see the pigs. We've named one after me. I chose him. I'm going to buy him, and we must take him in the car to Carey's pig-farm. He'll be trained to follow me about, and answer to his name, and make friends with dogs and horses."

Laura listened to these disclosures and then asked Jerry Carter whether it would be convenient for her to telephone her husband. When she had done this, the three strolled back to the castle, where Hamish had supper and then announced his intention of going to bed early, taking Perry Mason, the bloodhound, with him.

"More than I ever did at your age, except on Christmas Eve," remarked Jonathan, commenting upon the early bedtime.

"Oh, I have my pig to think about, and there are other projects to be worked out," Hamish explained. His mother

looked apprehensive, but knew that it would be of little use to ask questions, since her son had either inherited or acquired from his father the gift of side-stepping inconvenient queries without actually resorting to subterfuge. She made no comment, therefore, except to remind him to brush his teeth.

"Suppose," said Hamish, "you had only enough time to say your prayers *or* brush your teeth, which would you choose?"

"I should say my prayers *while* I was brushing my teeth," Laura replied.

"Would that be reverent, do you suppose, mamma?"

"Under the circumstances, yes," said Laura firmly.

"I must think about it. You see, you could hardly *say* your prayers while you were brushing your teeth, could you?"

"Oh, go to bed!" said Laura. Hamish took himself off, and Jonathan went along to say goodnight to him. He sat on the end of the bed while Hamish enlarged upon the beauty and the virtues of his pig and fondled the docile dog. Then the boy asked,

"Why have you and Deborah come here? Oh, it's not that I don't want you both, but it's all been fixed up in rather a hurry, hasn't it?"

"Oh, your father thought it would be a bit of extra holiday for us, I expect," said Jonathan easily. "Very thoughtful of him, we considered."

"I see. But it isn't *only* that, is it? Could it be because of the ghost?"

"Ghost? What ghost?"

"Oh, I've seen him, you know. I was hungry in the night last Wednesday, so I sneaked along to the dining-room for some biscuits. We keep them in the sideboard, and it isn't stealing because I have permission from Mrs. Dame to help myself whenever I like. I didn't make any noise, because I didn't want to disturb people, and when I reached the

dining-room I found that the door was wide open, and there was the ghost. He had his back to me, but I knew he was a ghost because he couldn't be anything else. I wanted to speak to him—not that the chaps at school would have believed me if I *had* spoken to him and swore to them that I had—but he seemed so sort of absorbed that I didn't like to bother him. Then he suddenly became about two feet shorter, and then he got tall again and simply disappeared. I suppose he just walked through the wall or something. What do you think?"

"I think you saw your father," replied Jonathan, untruthfully, "and that it wasn't as late at night as you thought it was."

"No," said Hamish, shaking his head, "it was not my father. I'd know him anywhere. For another thing, the ghost was nothing like so tall, and then, as I told you, it suddenly got a lot shorter and then shot up again, but not quite in the same place, it seemed to me, and disappeared."

"Did you really have time to notice all that?"

"Oh, yes, because I was wondering whether I should speak to it, you see."

"Was there any light in the room?"

"No, only the moonlight. It made the ghost look all shimmery, just as you'd imagine. There was a big, ugly shadow cast on the wall, but I didn't mind that a bit. It was really very interesting."

"Have you told anyone else that you saw the ghost?"

"Only Cook."

"Why the cook?"

"Oh, we're allies. I tell her everything. But I swore her to secrecy and I don't think she's told anyone else."

"I'm sure she hasn't. Maybe she didn't believe you. Well, good night, old chap. Sleep well, and—look here, I'm your buddy, too, so I'll slip you a big tin of biscuits tomorrow. You can keep it here in your bedroom, and then, if you get hungry in the night, you'll have biscuits handy and

won't need to go padding about the house catching cold. It would never do if you caught a dose of the sniffles and couldn't join your school party next week, would it?"

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that!" said Hamish, appalled by the suggestion. "It's quite true they *do* panic at school if you get a cold. Matron always thinks it's the beginning of measles or something. I suppose you couldn't bring me a few biscuits *now*, just in case I need them, could you?"

"All right, but don't give Perry Mason more than one. He's not supposed to eat between meals."

On the following morning, when Hamish and Laura had gone off for a swim and Deborah was in conversation with Bellairs in the kitchen garden where there were some roses she coveted for the house, Jonathan interrupted his aunt's morning session with the cook and asked whether she would come to the library to look at a fifteenth-century Book of Hours for which he thought of making Mrs. Dysey an offer.

Knowing that, whatever his interests, book-collecting was not one of them, Dame Beatrice concluded her interview with the cook, and went with him to the library. Jonathan shut the door, asked her to sit down, and then told her the story of Hamish and the ghost.

"Undoubtedly our hungry night-hawk, don't you think?" he asked, when she had listened in silence to what he had to say.

"It would appear so," she replied. "The fact that it cast a shadow seems to dispose of the idea that it had supernatural attributes." She cackled harshly and added, "Are you gifted in the discernment of secret passages, priest's holes, concealed trap-doors and the like?"

"You think that, in one sense, the ghost *did* disappear, then?"

"I think it might be interesting to find out whether the house possesses one or more of the features I have mentioned."

“Well, it *could* do, a house of this period, I suppose. Incidentally—and I only mention it in passing, because I’m pretty sure of the answer—Hamish himself couldn’t be our nocturnal prowler, could he?”

“If he were, I cannot envisage him restricting himself to Wednesdays and Saturdays. Besides, biscuits (to which, in any case, he has access at all times) are not comparable, as food, with the kind of viands which have disappeared. In my own mind I ruled Hamish out during the very earliest stages of the enquiry. That he might be our hungry hunter has not so much as crossed Laura’s mind, I am sure, or she would have mentioned it.”

“Oh, yes, of course she would. She seldom gives the lad a completely favourable press, so she’d have been certain to have grabbed him by the short hairs if she’d had any suspicions that he was our little jackdaw. Why does she always run the kid down?”

“It shows a reverse side of the gold medal of motherly love and pride, that is all. Laura is terrified of the depth of her feeling for her husband and her son, and is even more terrified by the thought that others may discern the truth, so that she loses no opportunity of publicly disparaging Hamish and Robert. They both understand her perfectly well, and, with true masculine chivalry, keep her secret. They have, of course, like all compatible males, a secret understanding between themselves.”

“I see. No wonder Hamish often seems older than his years. Well, now, about these hidey-holes you mentioned. I take it that we begin in the dining-room, since that’s where he saw this ghost. Doesn’t one tap the panelling and press knobs and knot-holes? I can’t wait to begin. Do we get Deb to join in the fun?”

“No,” said Dame Beatrice, to Jonathan’s surprise. “We do not.” She spoke with so much abruptness that he raised interrogative eyebrows and smiled at her. She added, with equal decisiveness, “I am not gifted with Laura’s instinctive



pricking of the thumbs, but I *am* afraid of what we may find. There has already occurred one unexplained death in this place, and, if a disputed inheritance is at stake, there may easily be another. I do not altogether care for the way our visitor has disappeared."

"Dear me! You curdle my blood!" He spoke lightly, but eyed her keenly. "You think there's more to this prowling business than the mere purloining of food, then?"

Dame Beatrice did not reply. She stood up, and Jonathan followed her to the dining-room. It was one of the three rooms shown to visitors, because it had an impressive Tudor fireplace, linen-panelled walls, and an interesting plastered ceiling of early date. Two embrasures, one on either side of the fireplace, had mullioned windows bearing the Dysey coat-of-arms of three ravens, and on one of these windows was inscribed the family motto *Salve Domina* and on the other the disquieting little rhyme:

*I am dede but have been seene—  
The ravens pickt my black bones cleane*

Jonathan studied this for a moment, and said, "Yes, I see what you mean. Well, we'd better find out where it's best to begin our search. Hamish was making for the sideboard." He went back to the doorway and then walked towards the heavily-carved piece of furniture. "He would have seen the ghost—where?"

Dame Beatrice joined him.

"We may assume that he had not helped himself to the biscuits *before* he saw the figure," she said, "so the likeliest place for us to investigate is the fireplace, since that is directly in one's line of vision as one walks towards the sideboard."

The fireplace, however, yielded nothing to their proddings and probings. Jonathan looked up the wide chimney but found no rewarding signs that it led to anything but the outside air. He went to the doorway again and surveyed the room.

"The likeliest thing is that Hamish spotted the ghost before he stepped into the room at all," he said, "but, to save time, would it meet with your approval if I asked Hamish where the ghost was standing when he spotted it? I don't want to scare him, of course, but we *are* rather working in the dark, aren't we? It will take several hours to test all the panelling in this room."

"I think that, if you choose your words, Hamish will only suppose that you are taking a kindly interest in his story of the apparition. In any case, he is not a child to take alarm easily, so, by all means, contact him," said Dame Beatrice. "I will leave it entirely in your hands."

Hamish and Laura came back ravenously hungry from their swim, and had hot milk, biscuits and cheese, and rubbed their hair dry in front of the enormous kitchen range. Then Laura took Deborah and the dog for a walk before lunch, and the opportunity presented itself for Jonathan to question the boy.

Hamish was delighted to find that Jonathan, whom he greatly admired, seemed to have taken his story seriously, and together they repaired to the dining-room, where the boy marched straight over to the embrasure whose window bore the sinister little rhyme, and said,

"He was in here. We have to keep it roped off because it's supposed to be unsafe, and, anyway, you can't see anything out of the windows. I know, because I've tried. They're sort of frosted over."

The windows were on two sides of the rectangular recess. The third side backed on to the enormous fireplace

and was linen-panelled, like the rest of the low-ceilinged rather gloomy room.

"Well, it seems as good a place for a ghost as anywhere else," Jonathan remarked.

"You mean because of the rhyme? Yes, I'd thought of that. I'm going to make a copy of it to show the chaps at school. Well, if you don't mind, I think I'll push off now and have another look at my pig. He won't get to know me properly unless I see a good deal of him, will he?" Hamish enquired.

"What's his name?"

"I call him County Mark, after Guillaume, Comte de la Marck, the Wild Boar of the Ardennes. He comes in Sir Walter Scott. Mrs. Dame suggested it when I asked her. I call her a most *gifted* person, don't you?"

When the boy had gone, Jonathan unfastened the silken rope, let the loosened end drop, and stepped cautiously into the embrasure. The floor, however, seemed as firm as a rock. He peered at the mullioned window opposite the fireplace wall, and then at that which, presumably, faced the keep, and found that the boy was right. The glass had been rendered opaque and there was no view to be had from either window. He stepped across to the panelled wall of the alcove, and as he stood staring at the linen-fold craftsmanship of the woodwork, the floor beneath his feet sank, with terrifying silence and suddenness, to a depth of about eighteen inches, and then remained stationary, so that he found himself standing in a square hole staring at an opening in the panelling. He stepped quickly up on to level flooring, but the low doorway in the panelling remained open.

He peered in. The aperture appeared to be a deep cupboard, stone-built except for its door. It went back for about nine feet, he judged, and at the further end there seemed to be a gaping hole. He went out of the dining-room, closing the door behind him, and sought Dame

Beatrice, whom he found in the pleasant little room which faced the gatehouse.

"I've found it," he said. "Come and see. Do you happen to possess an electric torch?"

Dame Beatrice acquired a powerful torch from her bedroom, and together she and Jonathan repaired to the dining-room, but the panelling had slid back into place. Jonathan opened it as he had done before, and remained standing on the spot, while Dame Beatrice examined the aperture and reported that at the back of it there was a staircase.

"I think," she said, "that I had better be the person to make the descent into Avernus. From what you say, it seems that the machinery involved in opening the panelling must work on some sort of counterpoise. No wonder the visitors are discouraged from trying their weight! I wonder how long it takes for the contraption to close? One would have thought that the moment you stepped out of that depression in the floor, the closure would have been immediate, but you say this was not so."

"Maybe it works in slow motion," suggested Jonathan. He looked at the gaping hole and then at his companion.

"Do you really think you ought to risk it?" he asked. "You don't want to get trapped down there. We might have to pull the house apart to get you out."

"I do not think there can be the slightest risk so long as you will be good enough to remain standing in the depression. I have no wish to emulate the unfortunate lady in *The Mistletoe Bough*, I assure you.'

So saying, she ducked under the low doorway and made for the steps. It was a long time before she reappeared.

"Quite interesting," she said. "The stair is in the thickness of the wall and then a ramped passage comes out into the undercroft of the keep. Laura declares that there was no way into the ground floor rooms of a Norman castle except by an inside staircase, so it looks as though the keep

was in better repair when this priest's hole was constructed than it is now."

"Well, anyway," said Jonathan, "it's clear enough what happened to make the ghost do its disappearing trick, and perhaps it explains how your midnight food-stealer got in."

"Not unless there is still another entrance to the priest's hole. But all that will have to wait. I have made a most disquieting discovery."

"Ah, I thought you were gone a long time."

"Yes, indeed. I have no option but to contact the police."

"Good Lord! What *did* you find?"

"Not only the priest's hole, but in it the body of a man. What is more, I know whose body it is. From the necessarily superficial examination I was able to make, I should say that it had been killed by a heavy blow on the base of the skull and was then pitched over into the undercroft from the gallery round the Great Hall and subsequently removed to the priest's hole with intent to conceal it."

## CHAPTER TEN

### The Dysey Inheritance

“Ye’se get a sheave o’ my bread, Willy,  
And a bottle o’ my wine:  
But ye’ll pay me when the seas gang dry,  
For ye’ll ne’er be Lord o’ Linne.”

*The Heir of Linne*

“Well, who is it?” asked Jonathan. “Nobody that I know, I trust?”

“No. He is a former patient of mine named Eustace Dysey.”

“Oh? A son of the house?”

“He had some claim to be the owner. The man who was in possession, Tom or Thomas Dysey, is also dead.”

“Sounds like something out of a nineteenth-century horror chronicle. What do you want me to do?”

“Take Deborah out for a drive after lunch and call on Doctor Binns. Bellairs will have his address. Meanwhile I will take Laura into our confidence and send her over to the home farm to telephone the police.”

“They’ll probably come before I can get hold of the doctor.”

“They will notify their own man, in any case, but a second opinion may be useful.”

“There’s your own opinion, as well. How long has the chap been dead?”

“About a week, I think.”

“Could be the ghost, then?”

“Or the ghost’s victim—or, in either case, our nocturnal prowler. I am glad Hamish is not in the house.”

Hamish preferred to eat his midday meal at the home farm, except when he elected to be on duty on Wednesdays and Saturdays at the castle, so, on this particular occasion, it was certain that he would be out of the way for the whole of the afternoon and the early evening when the police would be making their preliminary enquiries.

“And now,” said Dame Beatrice, when she had seen Laura and told her the news, “for an interesting little experiment.” She led the way to the dining-room, which she had locked up, and produced the key. She locked the door again as soon as they were inside the room. Followed by Laura, whom she commanded to stand well away, she went to the spot on which Jonathan had stood and remained there for several minutes. There was no response from the trap-door or the panelling.

“As I supposed,” she said, “when Jonathan told me that Hamish had inspected this forbidden territory. He is a well-grown boy, but neither his weight nor mine is sufficient to set the counterpoise in motion. Perhaps you would be good enough to see what you can accomplish.”

Laura stood on the spot. Nothing happened at first, and then (grudgingly, it seemed) the door in the panelling opened as the square of flooring very slowly gave way.

“That settles one thing,” Dame Beatrice remarked. “Unless we have solid and weighty persons in the house, you must not be the one to go into the priest’s hole in which the body reposes.”

“Whereabouts is the priest’s hole?”

“About half-way down the steps, on the right as one descends.”

“Behind the fireplace, then, more or less?”

"One would suppose so."

"Well, I'm just as glad I haven't to go down. Is—er—is the body knocked about, like the other corpse?"

"As I did not see the other corpse, I can make no comparisons. The head of this one is not pretty. It is just as well that you need not look at it."

"Many thanks. I mean, it's not as though I could do any good if I *did* see it, and I'd really rather not."

"Quite so. I think, from the nature of the injuries, the victim was struck on the head and the body thrown over the gallery railing on to the floor of the keep."

"What are we going to tell the servants?"

"Nothing at all, yet. They will find out soon enough. Now, if you will kindly go along and extract a sheet from the linen-chest in my room, I will see what I can do about making the poor man look a little more presentable than he does at present, without, of course, disturbing the body. The police would not care for me to do that."

"There must be some way of opening the panelling from the inside, you know," said Laura. "I mean, you could show the occupant in and shut the door on him, but there must be some means by which he could open it for himself from inside when the coast was clear. Otherwise, what happened to the wretched priest if his Catholic pal got apprehended by the powers that were, and was cast into the jug for plotting against the State, or whatever they brought it in as?"

"Of course there must be another entrance to the priest's hole as well, don't you think?" asked Dame Beatrice. "If not, how did the murderer get into the undercroft of the keep to reach the body?"

"Came through the house, same like the ghost," said Laura. Dame Beatrice pursed her lips in doubt of this, and Laura went off to procure the item which Dame Beatrice had specified. Her employer took the sheet from her, produced the powerful torch she had used before, and, humming (slightly off-key) the tune of *The Mistletoe Bough*, stepped



across the secret doorway as soon as Laura's weight had opened it again.

"I'll stay exactly where I am," said Laura, "until you come back. Do be careful down there, won't you?"

Dame Beatrice cackled harshly and disappeared into the depths. In a very short time she returned. Laura stepped off the spot on which she had been standing, and the door in the panelling very gradually closed with its former uncanny soundlessness.

"A pity Hamish has to miss the fun," Dame Beatrice remarked. "Let us hope that the police will have concluded their operations before he has to leave us, and then we can initiate him into these enthralling mysteries."

"I hope they won't want to question him. I wish Gavin were still here," said Laura.

"I think we may confidently expect him. Jonathan will have telephoned him, and, if I know our dear Robert, he will forsake all and be with us tomorrow."

This prophecy was rather more than fulfilled. The local police were still at the castle, conducting a preliminary enquiry, when Gavin came roaring up to the gatehouse on a motor-cycle. He had lost no time, but, upon receiving Jonathan's telephone call, had, in his own phrase, "dropped everything and scorched the earth" to reach the castle before nightfall.

The police, mindful of her eminence and her connections with Gavin and with the Home Office, had handled Dame Beatrice delicately. They did not expect to obtain any useful information from her, and were surprised to discover that she had known the dead man as a patient. They were interested, too, in her account of the mysterious activities of the purloiner of food, but were doubtful whether they agreed with her that the thief was likely to have been Eustace Dysey himself.

Hamish, to his great joy, was allowed to tell his story of the ghost, and Jonathan was asked what had led him to

think that there was a secret opening in the dining-room panelling. The answer to this—since Hamish had already told his tale—was obvious, but Jonathan gave it with grave courtesy. Laura, as Gavin's wife, was almost immediately dismissed from the enquiry and Deborah (apart from being asked to account for her presence at the castle—this because the police could think of nothing else to ask her) was not involved in the proceedings. The women servants, who were known to be birds of passage, were hardly questioned at all (this to their chagrin), but the gardener, as a local man and one who had known the Dyseys well, came in for a heavy bombardment, albeit one from which nothing helpful emerged.

"All in all," said Dame Beatrice, when the police had gone and the body had been removed for a post-mortem examination of a more exhaustive kind than had been possible in the priest's hole, "a disturbing yet remarkably dull day."

"What did you make of the body? I trust you had a good look at it," said Gavin.

"The injuries were consistent with those which would result from a very heavy fall from a considerable height, but the body was already dead, I think, before it fell."

"Murderers are seldom imaginative. They always tend to repeat their effects. The police intend to treat it as a case of murder, I take it?"

"Following the still unexplained death of Mr. Thomas Dysey, I suspect that they have no option. Of course, it may be that the manner of the former death has suggested a course of action to another murderer. Again, both deaths may have been accidental, or the result of attempts at suicide."

"If so, why should someone have taken the trouble to move the bodies and, in this second instance, even to attempt to conceal one of them?"

“That, indeed, is an interesting point. Besides, from my previous knowledge of Eustace Dysey, I am convinced that he was not of suicidal disposition.”

“And if the man had merely met with an accident, there would be no point in trying to hide the fact by concealing the body.”

“Except in respect of trying to conceal from possible lessees (such as ourselves) that the fabric of the castle is in a dangerous state of disrepair.”

“But the surveyor declared that it isn’t.”

“That is quite true, so we go to work at once on the assumption that both victims were murdered. It may be significant that Thomas was in possession of the Dysey inheritance and that Eustace had laid some claim to it.”

“I wonder why Eustace didn’t come forward and press his claim after the death of Tom? Press it through the courts, I mean.”

“There are two possible reasons—maybe more. First, when murder is suspected, the first object of the police is to establish the identity of the person who stood to gain most from the death. In the case of Thomas Dysey, the claimants to the property would appear to be his twin brothers Eustace and Cyril. The fact that *neither* openly pressed his claim seems to me to be indicative of certain knowledge on their part.”

“You mean they had no doubt whatever that Tom had been murdered, and they had some reason (possibly apart from their position of being next in line to inherit) to fear that suspicion would fall on them if they seemed too eager to step into Tom’s shoes? Yes, I see that, and, of course, the whole situation is complicated by the fact that neither can prove which is the older twin.”

“From what he told us, it would seem that Mr. Cyril Dysey had no intention of arguing about that, so far as the inheritance is concerned.”

"I know that's what he says. It isn't necessarily the truth, though, is it?"

"I agree, but, of course, there is also the possibility that Mr. Cyril himself now stands in some danger of being the next victim. The loquacious Bellairs indicated to Laura that Thomas Dysey had a son."

"That opens up a field for speculation, doesn't it? That is, if the son is still alive. I suppose Bellairs didn't think to mention that? I'll have speech with Bellairs a bit later on."

When the inspector called again, he confided to Gavin that Cyril Dysey had asked for police protection.

"Which made us think a bit, sir," the inspector continued.

"Yes," said Gavin. "Presumably he's the heir apparent to the estate, now that both his brothers are dead. If he thinks they've been murdered, and if he knows that he himself is not the murderer, he'd naturally have a thought for his own skin."

"He'd have a thought for it, too, if he *is* the murderer, sir."

"You suspect him, then?"

"Not to say suspect him, sir. We haven't got that far yet. And then, of course, there's Mr. Henry, who lives with him and is said to be his by-blow. And again, we know that Mr. Thomas had a son, but it's common belief he died."

"Have you found out how many people knew the secret of the priest's hole? Quite a bit hangs on that, of course."

"I realise that, sir, but it's not going to be an easy thing to sift out. They've only got to stick to stout denial, as the gentleman said."

"Yes, a cast-iron defence, provided that you don't weaken, and that there's no evidence to the contrary. Well, you've heard all that I know, which is precious little, so I'd better get back to my job. You know where to find me if you want me. I take it you won't need to keep the others here when their lease expires? In any case, Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan

Bradley know nothing which could help you, and I don't want my small son involved. He goes away at the end of the week, by the way."

"That's quite all right, sir, and about Mr. and Mrs. Bradley, too. We've got Mr. Bradley's statement about accidentally finding the staircase to the priest's hole, and your son can't possibly be of any help." He chuckled. "He went out of his way to tell us about the ghost he claims he saw, and, of course, it might be useful if he could describe him, but he can't, and we didn't like to put too much stress on the matter. It would have been useful if it had helped us to establish whether the figure was that of the dead man or his murderer. Help a bit with establishing the time of death, too, perhaps."

"Not really, you know. It could only establish the fact that Eustace Dysey, if he was the ghost, was still alive on that particular night. Personally, I'd be prepared to bet that the ghost was that of the murderer and, if it was, that wouldn't establish anything at all, unless you got actual proof of the ghost's identity and so were in a position to show that he, at least, knew of the existence of the priest's hole and how to get to it."

"There's still the question as to how the murderer got the body to it, sir. He could hardly have brought it through the house. It must have come in from the other end of that staircase, and that would fit in very nicely, except for one thing—you can't get into the undercroft, as Dame Beatrice calls it, except by way of the priest's hole. Anyway, our next job is to have a good look round again, although I can't really think we've missed anything."

"We're all missing one thing, and Dame Beatrice thinks so, too. We've simply got to find another entrance from outside the house, you know. Think what the murderer had to do. He meets his victim on the gallery in the keep, stuns or kills him, pitches the body over the railing, retrieves it and drags it along the ramped passage to the priest's hole.

How did he break into the house to get to the priest's hole, then out to the keep, then back with the body, then out of the house again? How did this chap who stole food get into and out of the house? I absolutely refuse to believe that nobody ever heard anything. Either somebody did, and won't say (and that, again, I don't credit) or else there's another secret entrance, and I bet I know where it is."

"Where would that be, sir?—although I grant that you're quite right."

"Somewhere at the base of that flanking tower at the end of the kitchen garden. But never mind that now. We can investigate the possibility later. To what extent does this case resemble that of the late Mr. Tom Dysey?"

"Apart from the nature of the injuries, we don't know yet. There was no attempt at all to hide Mr. Tom's body, the way this one was tucked away."

"No, so I gather. But Tom's body *had* been moved from the spot where death actually took place, though, hadn't it?"

"According to the medical evidence, yes, it had. Mr. Tom certainly couldn't have got the injuries the doctors described from just tumbling down a few steps in a spiral staircase. It was because the body had been moved that we suspected murder. If the body had been left where it was, which we also reckon was at the foot of that gallery inside the castle, the whole thing could have been taken as a suicide."

"Not an accident?"

"No, sir, not an accident. Or, if it was, it would have been the kind of accident that can't happen in that particular place. The railing is stout, and up to breast height. You yourself don't entertain the idea Mr. Tom's death was an accident, do you? I think you've come to the same conclusion as we have. Both men were first killed up there on the gallery and then thrown over the railing. We suggested it to the doctors, and they agreed that it could

have been done in just that way, and would be consistent with the injuries sustained, and the absence of bloodstains on the floor of the tower. The head-wounds which were the actual cause of death needn't have bled, it seems."

"When is the inquest to be held on Eustace Dysey?"

"Saturday, sir. We couldn't fix it earlier than that. For their own sakes I hope the jury won't want to inspect the body. It isn't pretty."

"I'll try to get along. In the morning, is it?"

"Ten o'clock, in the schoolroom at Ravens Dysey, sir. Only convenient place at short notice. It's a church school, but I've spoken to the vicar about it, and he hummed and hawed a bit, but I pointed out it was Crown business."

"What's your idea about all this, Inspector? Do you think it's all in the family, so to speak?"

"If so, it looks bad for Mr. Cyril and Mr. Henry, sir. Still, we've got to be sure of ourselves. Another thing is, if it happened as we think it did, we'll need to try and trace the weapon. A good chunk of stone would be the handiest, and if that was it, likely it will be anywhere in the lake or the river. Of course, with the place thrown open to the public twice a week, it wouldn't hurt to take a look at your visitors. Is there any chance of finding out who they were?"

"A pretty good one. We keep a Visitors' Book and try to get everybody to sign it. You'll have quite a job on your hands if you intend to interview them all, but I think it might just be worthwhile,"

"I reckon it's worth a try, sir. I wonder whether, before we do anything else, I could take a look at the other rooms open to the visitors? I've seen the hall and the dining-room, but I believe there's a state bedroom and a library on show."

"Right. You have a look at the state bedroom, then, and I'll wait for you in the library."

The inspector soon joined him.

"Nothing in the bedroom to help us, and there's nothing fishy in *this* room, sir, I take it?" he said, glancing round at

the dark-panelled walls and the open book-shelves.

"Not so far as we know," Gavin replied, "but that means nothing. We had no idea of the secret stair and the priest's hole in the dining-room until Mr. Bradley discovered them by accident."

"Guided by your son's story of the ghost, of course."

"Yes. We can search this room, if you like—that is, if you think it worth while."

"Not unless somebody else turns up missing, sir. What I'd like to do now is to take another look at that staircase and the castle basement it leads to. I think you said you'd like to take a look round with me. My sergeant will keep the trap open for us."

Obedient to the sergeant's twelve stone, the panelling opened and the inspector led the way into the short passage and down the stone steps. He paused at the priest's hole. It had no door and must have been a chilly harbourage, even in summer, Gavin thought, for there was, of necessity, no fireplace and the walls were of solid stone. There was a cavity at the far end which indicated a cupboard in which food could have been stored, otherwise there was nothing except an empty bleakness which their torches seemed only to make more obvious.

The inspector continued the descent. Seventeen more steps brought him and Gavin to another passage and this, sloping upwards, led them into the undercroft of the keep. Above them were the holes in which the timber beams to support the floor of the Great Hall had been lodged, and further support to this floor was indicated by the traces of pillar-foundations on the floor of the undercroft. The ruined stair (noted from the gallery by Laura) was in the south-west angle of the building, but only the last two steps of it were still intact. They went over and looked at it. The inspector shook his head, and switched off his torch.

"Not possible, I'd say, sir. There's nothing but these broken-away bits of the treads, and, anyway, they only



continue as rubble up the wall, just beyond those square holes. There's no way of getting down from the gallery. He *must* have sneaked in through the house, unless we can find this other entrance we spoke of. Some people can be as quiet as cats, you know." Gavin looked doubtful.

"You may be right, of course," he said, "but my wife needs very little sleep and her hearing is acute. Added to that, Dame Beatrice sleeps on a hair trigger. Both would have been aware of it if anybody had sneaked up through the house, you know. No, no, I'm certain there's another way into the priest's hole—ah, and that reminds me of another thing."

"Yes, sir?" The inspector looked interested, but the question was put in a guarded, non-committal tone which made Gavin smile.

"The pantry is directly under that little room from which, I'm told, the kitchen maid here heard singing. My son and my wife, at different times, heard singing coming from that flanking tower at the end of the kitchen garden. The body of Tom Dysey was found at the foot of the same tower. It seems to me to add up."

"Yes, we must have a go at that tower, sir. You mean there's an underground passage from it to the pantry, and from there to the priest's hole, but, if so, one thing needs explaining. If there are all these bolt-holes, why did the ghost, so-called, whether he was Mr. Eustace or the murderer, come out into the dining-room at all? It was taking a risk, and seems to have been unnecessary."

"Yes, I agree. Perhaps Dame Beatrice has a theory."

Her opinion being canvassed, Dame Beatrice said composedly,

"Yes, I've been wondering how to account for the appearance of the ghost that night. I think he had been paying a visit to the library."

"What for?" asked Gavin.

"In search of information on family matters, I assume."

"If so, that narrows things down to the family again. If he had been doing a bit of research, would you deduce that he was Eustace, or the murderer, or A.N. Other?"

"I think he was almost certainly the murderer, and was in search of information he had hoped to find on Eustace's body. I deduce that this information had not materialised."

"Yes, that sounds likely. Well, come on, Inspector. I could bear to have another look at the undercroft."

They quartered the ground conscientiously for the better part of an hour. Then the inspector straightened his back and suggested that they return to the house. In the dining-room they found the sergeant stolidly on duty. The inspector told him to remain where he was, then he took a stop-watch from his pocket and said,

"On the word, Pallis, step off. I want to time this thing exactly. *Now!*" The sergeant stepped out of the cavity. Ten seconds later the panelling was in place again. "So there it is," said the inspector, putting away the stop-watch. "Plenty of time for the murderer to step up out of the hole and get into the passage, but there he would have to stay, unless he had an accomplice, or there was this other bolt-hole, sir."

"There's still another answer," said Gavin, "and I suggest we try to find it."

"You mean it may be possible to open the panelling from inside, sir? Well, there's nothing to stop us trying. Step on it again, Pallis, will you? We'll give it half an hour when we get inside. Hope your watch is going. Park yourself in an easy chair when you step off, but do your clock-watching. We don't want to be buried alive."

The sergeant stepped back on to the spot, the panelling opened and the inspector entered the passage while Gavin went off to borrow Dame Beatrice's powerful torch. The panelling closed, and the two men began a systematic study of the walls of the passage before subjecting the staircase to the same scrutiny. Their inspection and all their rappings, tappings and manual explorations came to nothing. At the

end of the prescribed thirty minutes they returned to the dining-room.

“Well, that answer’s a lemon,” said Gavin, “and after we’ve had something to drown our disappointment and eaten a square meal, I had better be off. I’ll be back again for the inquest. I particularly want to hear the medical evidence, and I’m also interested to know what Cyril Dysey will have to say. I take it that he is the person to identify the body?”

“If he isn’t bumped off before he can do it,” said the inspector, cynically. “Looks as though he’s next in line of succession, as you might say, and it don’t look as though that’s any too healthy a thing to be, where this house and castle are concerned—unless, as I’m inclined to think, he did it.”

“You think the Dysey inheritance is lethal, then, Inspector?” Gavin asked the question gravely.

“They’re a funny lot, the Dyseys, sir, and this is a family matter, or I’m no judge of such things. Inheritances, like women, are kittle cattle, if I’ve got the right meaning of that saying.”

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### The Return of Mrs. Dysey

“She hadna ridden a mile, a mile,  
A mile but barely three,  
Ere she came to a new-made grave  
Beneath a green aik tree.”

*Jellon Grame*

In addition to questioning the inhabitants of Dysey Castle and investigating the priest's-hole and the state rooms, the inspector had also searched the rest of the house. He had found nothing helpful, he informed Dame Beatrice, except the address of the pension in Paris to which Mrs. Dysey had ostensibly repaired a day or two before the lessees of the castle had come into residence. He had notified her of her brother-in-law's death and had given her the date of the inquest, but she did not attend it and the body was identified, as Gavin had foreseen that it would be, by Cyril Dysey.

The medical evidence provided nothing new. There was no doubt but that Eustace Dysey had been dead before his body had fallen from a height considerable enough to cause the injuries which had been produced, and the post-mortem had revealed no trace of poison. However, the injuries resulting from the fall were so extensive that the doctor was not prepared to state the exact cause of death.

“Could the deceased have received a blow on the head sufficient to result in death?” the coroner asked him.

"That is possible."

"Could he have been strangled before he fell?"

"There is no evidence of that."

"Will you give the court your reasons for your opinion that he had been dead for at least five days when you examined the body?"

"I arrived at that opinion when I performed the post-mortem examination. There was gaseous swelling and internal disruption, with major staining of the skin. Skin blebs were also present."

"And these conditions have caused you to place the time of death as you have stated?"

"Yes. Rigor mortis had passed off completely and the green staining of the flanks, usually noticeable after two days, had been added to by later purple staining, by marbling of the veins, and by further spreading of discoloration into the neck and limbs. This would have been noticeable after three to four days, and would be followed by the symptoms which I have already described. Thus I concluded that the corpse was at least five to six days old."

"Will you tell the jury what you mean by skin blebs?"

"These are caused by small bubbles which disrupt the tissues, leading to the characteristic which is termed blebbing."

"Can you be sure that death could not have occurred earlier than you have diagnosed—that the deceased might have been dead longer than six days?"

"I say that it is most unlikely. The abdomen was not sufficiently distended, neither were all the organs disrupted by gas, which is what one would expect if the body had been dead for, say, a couple of weeks."

"Which parts of the body are the last to be disrupted?"

"The voluntary muscles, followed by the prostate."

"And this had not occurred? Well, thank you, doctor."

Dame Beatrice's opinion of the approximate length of time that Eustace Dysey had been dead thus being upheld by the official medical evidence, the inspector went to work again. Gavin went back to London, Laura took her son to join the school party which was bound for Denmark, Jonathan and Deborah returned to their own home, and Dame Beatrice, supported (although for one day only) by the women servants, she, the gardener, and her henchman George remained at Dysey Castle.

The first thing that happened, and this not at all to her surprise, was that the cook, the parlourmaid and the housemaid all gave notice.

"It being 'igh time to look about us for winter security, mum," said the cook, tactfully.

"I'm sure we've been very happy with you, madam, but us reckon not to stay in one place too long, like," said the parlourmaid, speaking for herself and her sister.

"I quite understand," said Dame Beatrice. "I will pay you your wages and then you can go at once." Left with the kitchenmaid, who had not uttered a word, she added, "And what about you, Zena?"

"No, thank you, mum. I've bin well suited here."

"But I'm only staying for the next few weeks, you know. Have you anything in mind?"

"Yes, mum, I have been promised a position with Mr. Dysey, mum, him as give evidence in court, when you gives up this 'ouse."

"Oh, really? Well, I hope you will like it there, and will settle in comfortably."

"I'm to learn the cookin', mum."

"I thought Mr. Dysey's wife did that."

"Not no longer she don't want to, mum. She's wishful to be a lady, like you and Mrs. Gavin."

"I see."

When Laura returned on the following day, Dame Beatrice said to her, "I think I had better send for Henri and Celestine. We can't expect Zena to do everything. Go over to the home farm and telephone them, will you?"

"Just as you say, but we could manage quite easily, you know."

"I hardly see how. We shall be here until the last week in October. It is not as though it were a few days."

"Oh, are you thinking of staying until the lease is worked out? I thought perhaps..."

"Did you?"

Laura grinned.

"Well, no, not really. Not with two unexplained deaths on our hands. What are you going to do about them?" she asked. "Shall you contact Mrs. Dysey?"

"That will be unnecessary," Dame Beatrice replied, "for I perceive her at the entrance to the gatehouse."

"Wonder why she didn't attend the inquest?"

"Perhaps we shall know very soon."

Mrs. Dysey presented a less shabby appearance than she had done at their last two interviews with her. Zena let her in and announced her.

"Mrs. Dysey, mum, unexpected, her says."

"I hope I'm not entirely unexpected," said Mrs. Dysey, glancing round to make certain that Zena had closed the door behind her. "The police asked me to come to the inquest on poor Eustace, but, of course, it was impossible, at this time of year, to book a seat on a 'plane at such short notice, so I had to travel back by rail and boat. Well, I'm sorry your visit had to end like this. Too bad! When did you want to move out?"

"When my lease of the castle has expired," said Dame Beatrice. Mrs. Dysey looked taken aback.

"You want to stay here, after what has happened? Oh, but really!"

"There is nothing in the agreement to say that I must give up my tenancy because there has been a violent death."

"Well, really—I mean, of course you're within your rights if you wish to stay. I should have thought you would have been only too glad to leave. I would, of course, expect to refund a proportion of the rent you paid."

"No, no," Dame Beatrice assured her, "I shall be delighted to stay."

Mrs. Dysey's face and manner changed.

"Oh, but, meanwhile, what am I going to do? After all, this is my home. You must leave immediately. Really you must!" she cried. Dame Beatrice looked solemn and said,

"I am afraid I must hold you to the terms of the agreement. It is necessary for me to remain here until my lease expires."

"But you *can't*! Where am I to go?"

"I cannot offer you temporary accommodation here, I am afraid. My work would suffer, and that, of course, is not to be thought of. But you would like some tea before you go."

Laura rang the bell and gave the necessary order to Zena. There was a long silence after the bell was answered. Laura went over to the writing table and, with her back to the antagonists (for such she felt them to be), began a letter to her husband. Tea was brought in at the end of a quarter of an hour. Laura joined the others and poured out. Dame Beatrice chatted. Mrs. Dysey made monosyllabic replies at first. Then she said, with some suddenness,

"Please tell me all you know about Eustace's death. How did he come to be here? He was supposed to be in Eastbourne. I don't understand it at all."

Dame Beatrice gave a brief account of the accidental discovery of the priest's-hole and of how she herself had found the body there. She made no mention of the thefts of food. She concluded by saying:



"I suppose you knew of the existence of the secret stairway?"

"I had heard of it, but I did not know where it was or how to get to it. Of course, there have always been stories that it existed."

"Somebody *knew* that it did."

"Eustace himself may have known. He was always poking all around the place. Nothing better to do, I suppose! If I'd realised what a nuisance he was going to make of himself, I would never have had him back here after the war."

"You found him a disturbing influence?"

"Of course I did—creeping about, poking, and prying. There wasn't a corner of the house we could call our own. I even found him half-way up the chimney of my bedroom on one occasion."

"He appears to have been an enthusiastic seeker after truth."

"Not truth! *Proof!*"

"Proof of the existence of the priest's-hole, do you mean?"

"No, I mean proof of the validity of his claim to the castle and estates."

"That would have been after your husband's death, of course. We have made the acquaintance of Mr. Cyril Dysey, and he tells us that he and Mr. Eustace were twin brothers, and that Mr. Thomas Dysey, your husband, was the eldest son."

"He died, you know."

"Yes, we do know that."

"Under very peculiar circumstances."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. What have you heard?"

"That he was found dead by the gardener at the foot of the flanking tower on the blind side of the house—the tower which stands at the end of the kitchen garden."

"Oh, well, if that's all that you heard..."

"You allowed us to believe, did you not, that your husband was still alive when we agreed to rent the castle?"

"Yes, I did. It was neither here nor there, so far as you were concerned, I thought, and, for myself, well, it seemed safer to allow you to think that you had a man to deal with. I am unused to business matters and am afraid of being cheated. Not that I am suggesting for a moment, of course, that *you* would attempt to cheat me, but you must allow that I did not know you, let alone who you were, at the time."

"Quite. I wonder who—I take it that one of your baptismal names is Henrietta?"

"Unfortunately it is. I was christened Thomasina Henrietta Victoria, if you wish to know."

"I see. I wonder whether you know that there seems to be another Henrietta Dysey?"

"*Another* Henrietta Dysey?"

"She was one of the visitors—those, I mean, who pay to be allowed to inspect the castle."

"There is no other Henrietta Dysey, so far as I am aware. What does she look like?"

"She is a little above the average height. She has dyed brown hair. She has shortsighted (I should imagine) pale blue eyes, takes a number six shoe, has thin hands with long fingers, used to bite her nails (I think), speaks with an accent I associate with the Earls Court district of London, is inclined to be dictatorial, is either indigent or mercenary—perhaps both—and she came here on a not very new Raleigh bicycle."

"Good heavens! Oh, yes, that's Henrietta, all right."

"But I thought you said..."

"I'd forgotten all about her. As a matter of fact, I heard some years ago that she was dead. Why on earth did she want to come here? She's not a Dysey. I don't know that I ever heard her surname. There was some scandal, I believe,

but, really, I know very little about it. Henry was a child of two when I married Tom, and he was living in the castle at the time, but he was adopted—I suppose that's the right word—by my husband's brother Cyril, and has lived at the chalet ever since Cyril bought it. But that is neither here nor there, so never mind about Henrietta—although, really, I can't think why she came here. Tell me about the inquest. What did the doctor say?"

"That Eustace Dysey had fallen from a considerable height, but that he was dead before he fell," said Dame Beatrice, fascinated by the muddled speech she had just heard.

"I know what the verdict was, of course. Such utter nonsense! Neither my husband nor Eustace was murdered. The police must be mad! My husband's death was a sheer accident, and, if Eustace was the cause of it, no wonder he committed suicide. It was only to be expected."

Dame Beatrice pursed her lips into a little beak.

"Of Mr. Thomas Dysey's death I know next to nothing," she said, "but it does seem that somebody carried Mr. Eustace Dysey's body to the priest's-hole, the inference being that this was in an attempt to hide it. That certainly seems to suggest foul play, does it not?"

"Oh, nonsense! My own theory is that Eustace had found the priest's-hole and, having fatally injured himself in an attempt at committing suicide, crept into it to die."

"Why should he do that?"

"Oh, he was always cunning and secretive—and very silly and romantic, of course."

"I see."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Dysey, rising from her chair, "I suppose I'd better go along to John Carter at the farm and beg for a bed, since you are determined not to have me here."

"I understand that Mr. Carter is also a Dysey by descent," said Dame Beatrice, accompanying her to the

door, "and I am sorry to be churlish about refusing you shelter. Apart from everything else, I have no servants here at present except for the child who showed you in. That fact alone makes it virtually impossible to entertain visitors."

"But I left you a cook, a parlourmaid, and a housemaid! What has happened to *them*?"

"They folded their tents, like the Arabs. In other words, they were chary of remaining in a house which has been searched by the police and which, by repute, is haunted."

"Haunted? By whom?"

"I was hoping you could tell me that."

"Have you *seen* anything?"

"Personally, no, I have not. But a figure has been seen in the dining-room and ghostly singing has been heard."

"Eustace, on both counts. I suppose he never left the place, although he promised me he would vacate it while I was away. But that is Eustace all over. If Alice Carter won't take me in at the farm, what do you suggest I should do?"

"Ask Mr. Cyril Dysey for a bed?" suggested Dame Beatrice. Mrs. Dysey stared at her, pausing at the door in order to do so. Dame Beatrice cackled.

"A joke *not* in the best of taste, if you knew all," Mrs. Dysey said. "Well, I will wish you a very good afternoon, and if the police plague *you* about Eustace as they plagued *me* about Tom, you will have my sympathy."

"I wonder," said Dame Beatrice, "whether you have any theory to account for the fact that your husband was wearing cricketing flannels when his body was found?"

"No, I haven't. Tom and I had not shared a room for years. It was nothing to me how he chose to dress."

"And the police, of course, will have asked you all the questions which would occur to an outside observer."

"If you mean to ask me whether I know who Tom was going to meet that night, or whether he was, in fact, going to meet anybody, the answer to both questions is the same: I simply don't know. What business is it of yours, anyway?"

"I found Mr. Eustace's body, and have been subjected to police questioning. Does not that make it something of my business to find out, if I can, what has been going on in this castle?"

"What did you make of her?" asked Laura, when Mrs. Dysey had gone. "She was a bit hole-and-corner on the subject of the other Henrietta, I thought. First she didn't know her, and then she did. Very in-and-out running, if you ask *me*."

"I wonder why she expected to be allowed to stay here? She could not possibly have thought I would agree."

"I think her basic idea was to turn us out. She's a very fishy customer, I'd say. I didn't exactly take to her on the other occasions when we met her, but this time I felt extremely anti-Etta. I had the impression that you felt the same—or was that wishful thinking on my part?"

"I felt that it was unreasonable of her to expect us to vacate the castle at almost a moment's notice, although I agree that that was really what she wanted."

"Cool cheek, I call it. Besides, if she can come here now, she could have come over for the inquest, and then, I suppose, you'd have *had* to put her up for a night or two."

"She explained why she could not attend the inquest."

"Phooey!—as a dear old friend of ours would say. I bet she could have come to it if she'd wanted to. Afraid she might be asked some awkward questions, don't you think? She's a menace! I don't trust her an inch, and I can tell that you don't, either. There's something desperately fishy about her. I've thought so all along."

"I think she is keeping her own counsel—and is determined not to help the police to track down the person or persons who killed Thomas and Eustace Dysey."

"Are you going to take on the job yourself? You have the air of a woman who has something up her sleeve."

"I take no more than an academic interest in the matter."

"Well, that goes for the police, in a way, I suppose. I mean, they're not spurred on by motives of revenge. You'd have to kill a policeman to get that kind of reaction from the Force."

"You are right. Revenge, in any case, is a sordid type of triumph, so let academic interest hoist its banner."

"You *are* going to muscle in, then?"

"An unsuitable metaphor to apply to my urge to research into a delicate problem."

"Would you call murder a delicate problem?"

"No, but the question of an inheritance may be described in those terms."

"How are you going to begin?"

"By talking with the persons who were members of the house-party on the night when Thomas Dysey was killed."

"You think these are dynastic murders, so to speak? But, if that's so, the murderer is either Cyril or Henry Dysey."

"Unless, of course, there is a nearer claimant who has not yet appeared on the scene."

"Oh, so *that's* what you think! Well, a constructive natter or two should bring him to the surface. Who's your first victim to be?"

"The vicar's wife, I think," Dame Beatrice replied.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### The Vicar and I Were There

“She has cast awa’ the brown and the red,  
And she’s follow’d him to beg her bread.  
She has ta’en the scales o’ gowd frae her hair  
She has ta’en the scales o’ gowd frae her hair

*Hynd Horn*

The church, with its vicarage, was distant some two miles from the castle, but was on what had once been demesne land, according to the custom of the time when it had been built. The village of Ravens Dysey was half a mile south of it, and the church tower resembled the Dysey Castle keep in that it had been a stronghold in the troubled times of Matilda versus Stephen. Laura had visited the church in company with Hamish on the Sundays when both had been resident at the castle, and had pronounced it as being “quite respectably Norman, with an Early English chancel and a broach spire.” Hamish had added to this description by referring enthusiastically to “two fab. brasses, Mrs. Dame dear, and, if I can get some heel-ball and a big enough piece of paper, I’ll take some rubbings for you if I can get permission from the vicar.” The rubbings had not materialised. He was kept too busy down at the home farm, he explained, to be able to spend time on mere pleasure.

A sighting-shot, as Laura termed it, had been aimed at the vicarage in the form of a letter delivered by George, who brought back the answer that the vicar and his wife would

be delighted to take lunch at the castle. After lunch, while Laura showed the vicar the keep, the battlements and the priest's-hole, Dame Beatrice and the young wife sat out on the grassy side of the courtyard and conversed. Mrs. Charlock was in the last few weeks of her first pregnancy, and had declined to inspect flanking towers or to negotiate spiral staircases.

"I suppose you have been to this castle before," Dame Beatrice observed.

"Only once, on the night Thomas Dysey was killed. Edward was appointed to the living here three years ago. He was curate of a parish in the Midlands before that, and did a good deal of youth club work with which I helped him before we were married. The Dyseys called on us when Edward was inducted, but, after that—" She shrugged.

"And what is your opinion of youth clubs?"

"It's rather like preaching to the converted, I always think. The decent youngsters come, and those we'd really like to get hold of stay away—or amuse themselves wrecking the place. We had quite a bit of that."

"Discouraging."

"I suppose one just has to go on long enough. All the same, I was glad when Edward was given Ravens Dysey. It's a change to have a bit of peace, especially now the baby's coming. It was that which decided Edward to take the living, the fact that we wanted children later on."

"You knew both the late Mr. Dyseys, I take it?"

"Well, they never came to church, and neither did Mrs. Dysey. In fact, we had never met them (except, as I say, for their courtesy call when Edward first became the incumbent) until we were invited to that awful dinner-party, after which Thomas Dysey was killed."

"It seemed—Mr. Thomas Dysey's death, I mean—not only tragic but mysterious."

"There was a great deal of talk, of course, some of it malicious, and most of it, I daresay, ill-informed."



“Malicious? Weren’t the Dysey family popular?”

“Well, the husband and wife were not—quite the reverse, I would think. Eustace got by because he had been in the Air Force and had been a prisoner of war. Then somebody found out that he had psychiatric treatment—how *that* came out I have no idea, but I put it down to Mrs. Dysey. It was well known that she didn’t like him and thought him an encumbrance. I don’t suppose there was anything in the story, anyway.”

“Oh, the story was true,” said Dame Beatrice. “I was the psychiatrist. Mr. Eustace Dysey had had a bad time as a prisoner, and was referred to me for treatment.”

“Oh—how interesting. Did you—was it—I mean, is that why you came here? And did you know that Thomas Dysey was dead?”

“No, I certainly did not know, before I came, that he was dead.”

“There were two rumours which went the rounds. One side thought he had committed suicide, but the other people were convinced that one of his brothers had killed him.”

“Why did that come into their minds?”

“Well, it’s all rather involved and, as the wife of the vicar, I couldn’t very well join in the gossip (although I’d have loved to) so I don’t suppose I’ve heard more than half the story, but I gather that some people thought that Eustace, not Tom, should have had the place, and that somebody had tried to see that he got it.”

“Do you mean that Eustace himself was suspected of killing his brother?”

“Oh, nobody, so far as I know, went as far as that, but all sorts of hints were put out, and it does seem as though there was a family secret—a skeleton in the cupboard, you know. For myself, I should never have given the matter another thought, once the rumours stopped and the village settled down again, but I’m afraid the gardener talks, you

know—not to me or to Edward, of course—and he seems to have spread some well-founded rumours.”

“Yes, I see. What rumours, I wonder?”

“Oh, that Tom Dysey had no right to have inherited the Dysey estate. He was illegitimate.”

“Interesting. Did the gardener go any further?”

“He seems to have said that the heir should have been Eustace, but, as I said before, he doesn’t seem to have been the only person in the village who thought so.”

“What about the twin brother, Cyril?”

“I don’t know. Still, now that both Tom and Eustace are dead, I suppose Cyril is the obvious claimant.”

“He does not like Dysey Castle, and, from what I have gathered, the estate is worth little or nothing. But tell me what happened at that dinner party, after which Thomas Dysey died.”

“Nothing out of the ordinary, so far as Edward and I knew at the time. We were rather surprised at being invited to dinner, but there was no reason why we should refuse. We are here under Dysey patronage, of course.”

“Really? What, exactly, do you mean by that?”

“The arrangement is that the Dyseys are allowed to sell the living once, and give it once. The man who had it before Edward, he bought it, but Edward was given it. We couldn’t possibly have afforded to buy it, anyway.”

“I had no idea that benefices were still bought and sold. But tell me more about the house party.”

“Well, it was called that in the papers, but only after Tom Dysey’s death, and it’s really too grand a description. The people actually staying in the castle at the time were Tom and Etta Dysey, Eustace (who lived with them), Cyril Dysey, and two nieces, or second cousins or something, on Etta’s side of the family. The rest of us, Edward, myself, Doctor Binns, and his wife, were merely invited to dinner and went home before ten o’clock, the doctor giving us a lift in his car, which was very helpful. Being unaccustomed to it,

I'd had rather too much to drink and didn't feel at all myself."

"Did anything come up in conversation which, on thinking it over afterwards, made you suspicious about Tom Dysey's death?"

"Nothing at all. In any case, I'm not a bit gifted about putting two and two together. There was only one tiny puzzle..."

"Yes?"

"I *did* just mention it to Edward. We wondered why Henry Dysey had not been invited. After all, he lives with Cyril, doesn't he?"

"Do you know for a fact that he was not invited? Could it be that he elected not to come?"

"I hardly think so. Our invitation was in the form of a letter from Mrs. Dysey, and in it she said that she would like us to meet her nieces and her brothers-in-law Eustace and Cyril, and that she hoped Doctor and Mrs. Binns would be there."

"No mention of Henry? I see. It does seem curious. Of course, he and Cyril may have received their invitation by word of mouth before your written invitation had been sent out."

"And Henry turned it down straight away, you mean? Oh, yes, that's a possible explanation. Perhaps he didn't want to meet those giggling girls. They were rather trying. They even tried to flirt with Edward."

"Most inappropriate. What was Thomas Dysey's mood? Did he appear to have anything on his mind? I know that is a leading question."

"I studied history at college and am proof against leading questions and special pleading, I think. If he *did* seem a trifle distraught, I should have thought (if I'd noticed it, which I didn't) that he was anxious to have the evening turn out well. The Dyseys did very little entertaining, so I heard."

"It is usually left to the hostess, I thought, to be anxious that a dinner-party should be a success."

"Well, yes, I suppose so. Anyhow, I can't say I noticed anything out of the way, but then, as I told you, the drinks upset me a bit, and my recollections may be a trifle blurred."

"Was there any particular reason for a dinner-party?"

"There must have been, but I didn't discover what it was."

"What made you think that there might have been a particular reason?"

"I didn't, until Mrs. Binns remarked to me that, when they received their invitation, she thought it must mean that there was some good news about Bonamy."

"Bonamy?"

"Oh, he's the son, only he got himself into some kind of trouble about five years ago—or it might have been more—and had to be shipped off to South America, or somewhere, in a great hurry. There, it was supposed, he died. At any rate, there's a rather peculiar memorial to him in the church. Oh, Mrs. Binns must have been wrong! She told me about him on the way home in the car, but, as I say, I wasn't in a state to take much notice. I was summoning all my resolution not to be sick."

"How was Thomas Dysey dressed?"

"Oh, you're thinking about the flannels he was wearing when the body was found. At dinner he was wearing the ordinary black tie outfit. It was anything but new—not that I should talk!—but it was quite *de rigueur*."

"How long had Mrs. Dysey's nieces been in the castle?"

"They'd come the day before, and were to stay until the end of the week, but, of course, Tom Dysey's death rather put paid to that. The police soon realised that they couldn't help solve the mystery, so I suppose Mrs. Dysey sent them straight home."

"Did the police question you and your husband?"

"Very apologetically, yes, but, of course, we didn't know a thing."

"And Doctor Binns?"

"Well, he was a bit more useful, because he was sent for as soon as the gardener reported finding the body, so he was able to take a look at it before the police arrived."

"Has Doctor Binns been in practice here long?"

"Oh, yes, he inherited the practice from his father. He's known the Dysey family for years."

"I should like to meet him. I saw him when he gave evidence at the inquest on Eustace Dysey, but I did not get a chance to speak to him afterwards."

"I suppose..." The vicar's wife hesitated.

"Yes," said Dame Beatrice briskly, "you are quite right. It *was* madness to hide the body in the priest's hole, but to leave well alone appears to be beyond the scope of most human beings."

"I suppose it *was* the murderer who hid it? I had taken for granted that it was, but, on second thoughts—"

"I salute the trained mind of the historian, but whether whoever moved the body was the murderer, or someone who thought that he was assisting the murderer, or whether he thought he was helping to bring him to justice, I cannot at this point determine."

"I should have thought that whoever moved the body intended that it should never be found."

"That may be so. On the other hand, I have not very much doubt that somewhere in the archives of the house mention is made of the priest's hole."

"That means that a member of the family must have moved the body."

"Unless we can find someone outside the family who may have had access to the Dysey library."

"That's not very likely, is it? I mean, Dysey Castle isn't one of the talked-about show places."

"It is listed in print as a possible place to visit, and, from my own knowledge, a surprising number of people do tend to visit it."

"Only because of the mystery of Tom's death. You'll get more than ever, now that Eustace has been found in the priest's hole."

"Not unless they are prepared to defy the police. No public opening of the house and castle is to be permitted at present. We are in purdah, or chancery, or quarantine—what you will. At any rate, the general public is to be excluded until further notice."

"Oh, dear! If it doesn't involve spiral staircases, I'd love to have you show me over the castle and let me see the priest's hole?"

"You shall see all that you wish to see. Come with me, and please comment freely. I shall value your views."

"About anything in particular?"

"Certainly. About how the person who stole food from the house gained entry. It seems that he must have visited us by way of the passage which leads past the priest's hole to the dining-room."

"That sounds simple enough. He must have known of the existence of the passage. That's all there is to it, surely?"

"Very true. My difficulty is that there seems to be no way of entering the passage from below except from the undercroft of the keep, and there seems to be no way of entering the undercroft of the keep except from the passage."

"I don't understand what you mean."

"Come, then, and I will show you what I mean, as soon as Laura and your husband have finished their tour of the castle. We shall need one of them to stand on the trap-door and operate the mechanism."

"I think perhaps I'd rather not go, after all."

"Very well. I can easily explain what I mean."

"I see," said the vicar's wife, when the explanation was over, and she and Dame Beatrice had joined Laura and the vicar in the library. "Of course, castles were often undermined, you know. If you could find that that had happened, there might be a passage you haven't yet found. That would clear the matter up, wouldn't it?"

"But undermining, Hilda," said her husband, "was done with the object, surely, of bringing down the tower, or, at any rate, of breaching a hole in one of its angles. It was not used as a direct means of gaining entrance, so far as I am aware, except that, of course, once there was a breach in the walls..."

"That's true," his wife agreed. "Suggestion dismissed contemptuously."

"Not at all, my dear, not all. It merely seemed to me..."

"Vicar," said Dame Beatrice, interrupting him with some suddenness, "I understand that when you vacate the living it will be sold to the highest bidder."

"Well, well! I should hardly like to put it in that way, you know, Dame Beatrice," said the puzzled man, somewhat shocked by the crude supposition, "but, yes, the living will be sold, not given, when I vacate it."

"There is method in my question," said Dame Beatrice. "Is Mrs. Dysey as poorly endowed with this world's goods as her appearance, and the fact that she lets out the castle on lease for three months every year, would seem to suggest?"

"I've really no idea. The estate itself, of course, is almost worthless. I don't know whether it would be commercially sound to pasture sheep on these hills, but, apart from that, I see no other source of possible profit, unless a speculator in land would buy it up for building purposes."

"We will take it, then, that Mrs. Dysey is poor. Upon that assumption, let us return to this question of the living here at Ravens Dysey."

"If you mean to ask me whether it is a good one, well, from my limited experience of livings, yes, it is. The stipend derives from the interest on a vast fortune amassed by a member of the Cowleigh family in India during the halcyon days of the East India Company."

"Indeed? Then how do the Dyseys come into it?"

"Well, they owned the land, I believe, on which the church is built. Then a later Dysey lent money to the Cowleighs and, to discharge the debt, asked that his family should be allowed to sell the benefice every second time it fell vacant. It is all very involved, I'm afraid, and I have never found time to go fully into it. I take it that at some time in the distant past—probably in the time of the Third Crusade—the Dyseys bought the castle from the Cowleighs and re-named it, but the Cowleighs may have retained some of the rights."

"I trust that you have insured your life," said Dame Beatrice. The vicar stared at her.

"Insured my life? Such a thought has never occurred to me. All the same..." he glanced at his wife, heavy with their first child..."it is a good idea, I think. Thank you, Dame Beatrice. I will certainly see about it. Not but what..."

"Oh, I promise not to murder you if you insure your life in my favour," said his wife. Then her face changed as she caught Dame Beatrice's eye. She laughed uncertainly, and added, "Oh, dear! I'm talking about rope in the house of the hanged, I suppose!"

In obedience to a sign from her employer, Laura said,

"Come and see my son's awful bedroom, and keep your fingers crossed that your baby will be a girl."

"I wonder when is the best time to call upon the doctor?" said Dame Beatrice, when they had gone from the room. "I am anxious to consult him."

"Not on your own account, I trust?" said the vicar. "His surgery hours are from half-past nine until eleven, and from six-thirty to eight o'clock, I believe."



"My health is excellent, I thank you. I wish to obtain a firsthand account of his inspection of the body of Mr. Thomas Dysey, that is all. I saw the body of Eustace, and should be glad to make a comparison of my findings with those of Doctor Binns."

"You yourself are a doctor of medicine, then, Dame Beatrice?"

"Of medicine, and so forth," said Dame Beatrice, waving a yellow claw. "Moreover," she added, "I was not joking when I suggested that you insure your life. To take a fortnight's holiday would be even more to the point. I have a distant relative in Holy Orders who would be delighted to exchange pulpits with you. He lives in Norfolk. Could you get away within, we will say, the next two or three weeks?"

"Indeed not, dear lady. I have already taken my annual vacation. I could not dream of quitting the parish again so soon. But you fill me with the most intense curiosity. Will you not explain?"

"I think your life may be in danger, and, although you may care to take the risk on your own account, you must not involve your wife, or violate my tender conscience. I warn you that it might be to the great advantage of one of the Dyseys to have the living vacant again."

"I cannot take you seriously."

"You would be better advised if you did. Tell me, if you will, all that took place here on the evening preceding Thomas Dysey's death."

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### A Cleric's Evidence

“‘What matter is this?’ said the Bishop;  
‘Or for whom do you make this ado?  
Or why do you kill the King’s ven’son,  
When your company is so few?’”

*Robin Hood and the Bishop of Hereford*

“I am at a loss where to begin,” said Charlock.

“In such case, the advice of the King of Hearts to the White Rabbit might be followed with advantage. ‘Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop,’” suggested Dame Beatrice.

“The beginning would be my acceptance of the surprising invitation from the Dyseys to dine here at the castle.”

“*Surprising* invitation?”

“Most surprising. It was the first time anything of the sort had come my way. The Thomas Dyseys paid me a courtesy visit after my induction as incumbent of the parish, but, until this invitation came along, I had seen nothing more of him or his wife. The only time I called here I was told that they were not at home. As I knew that they were both in residence, I took this to mean that they did not wish to entertain my presence, so I troubled them no further.”

“But you were not inclined to refuse their invitation to dinner?”

"It would not have been becoming in me to nourish ill-feeling, although I am afraid I agreed with my wife's reading of the summons."

"And that was?"

"She thought that some other couple had failed to accept an invitation to the function, and that we were being used as a stopgap."

"But this was not the case?"

"I hardly know what to think. The party was an extremely small one, and the atmosphere could have been delightfully informal had the guests been better matched or the Dyseys more gifted as hosts."

"You found the atmosphere uncongenial?"

"That is not quite the word. It is difficult, by this time, for me to remember exactly what I felt. I know that the food was not very good, and I know that Mrs. Dysey, our hostess, seemed to be on edge. I put this down to the customary anxiety of an inexperienced hostess that the dinner should go off well. I wonder now, though, whether there might have been some more sinister explanation of her state of mind."

"What were the seating arrangements at table?"

"My wife was on Mr. Thomas Dysey's right, and she sat between him and his brother Eustace. Next to Eustace was Mrs. Binns, the doctor's wife, then came Cyril Dysey, who was therefore next to Mrs. Dysey. She sat at the end of the table opposite her husband. I was on her right, next to a young woman, one of her second cousins, I believe, and the doctor sat between this girl and her sister."

"I heard that the Chief Constable of the county and his wife had also been invited, but could not accept," said Dame Beatrice.

"Ah, well, that probably accounts for our own invitation, then. We must have been right in what we thought at first."

"It may equally well be that the stopgaps, if any, were the doctor and his wife, surely?"

“Oh, Binns is a sociable fellow, quite unlike myself, and, of course, he was the Dyseys’ physician, whereas I could hardly call myself their chaplain.”

“Can you remember what Thomas Dysey talked about?—what mood he seemed to be in, and so forth?”

“He was not in a genial humour, but he conversed with my wife and occasionally with the young woman on his left, but I have no idea what they talked about. My wife is a keen gardener, so she may have led the talk in that direction.”

“Was Mrs. Dysey the only person who appeared anxious?”

“Well, no. Eustace Dysey made himself very agreeable to the doctor’s wife, but Cyril Dysey said nothing except to pay a grudging tribute to the claret we were offered, and I myself attempted, without much success, to interest Mrs. Dysey in a history of the parish which I am preparing. I threw out a pretty strong hint that I should be grateful for an opportunity to look through some of the books and manuscripts in the library here, but either Mrs. Dysey did not catch my drift, or else she was determined to keep me out of the house, for there was not the slightest suggestion that I should be welcome to inspect her treasures.”

“And has your history of the parish been published?”

“I felt that it would be woefully incomplete without mention of the castle and its archives, so I have had to content myself with a small brochure on the history of the church.”

“My tenancy of the castle is nearing an end, but if you would care to take advantage of what remains of it...”

“It would not be ethical, perhaps, for me to do so, as Mrs. Dysey ignored my (I think) rather obvious suggestion that I should be grateful for such an opportunity.”

“Oh, nonsense!” said Dame Beatrice. “I am anxious to consult some of the books and manuscripts myself, and a clause in my lease gives me all rights over everything movable in the castle, so long as I do no damage. This must

include the books, and, if you have any scruples concerning these, I will undertake to stay in the library while you are there, and keep a stealthy eye on you."

"Well, thank you. In that case, I shall be delighted to take advantage of your kindness. May I ask—merely as a fellow-scholar, of course—what your particular interest in the Dysey archives may be?"

"Certainly. In fact, you can be of help to me if you will. I want to find out whether—or, rather, how—the priest's hole can be opened from the inside. It seems to me that there must be some reference to this among the Dysey papers."

"Not necessarily, surely? Might it not be one of those secrets which are passed by word of mouth from father to son?"

"While the priest's hole was being used for its obvious purpose, yes, I am sure that would have been so, but do you not think some eighteenth-century antiquarian would have made it his business to investigate the thing and write a note on it?"

"Possibly. At any rate, I will keep an eye on the possibility while I am engaged in my researches. When would it be convenient for me to begin them?"

"As soon as ever you like. The sooner the better, I would suggest, as my lease is running out. Would you care to come back, and to begin this evening?"

"You are most kind. I shall be delighted. We dine at seven. Would half-past eight suit you?"

"Admirably. And now that that is settled, I wonder whether you will be good enough to continue to reconstruct for me the events of that evening in which I am interested?"

The vicar stared at a grotesquely-carved panel above the fireplace.

"It is all rather vague," he said, "by this time. We were greeted without, I thought, much warmth, by Thomas Dysey, and were taken to the dining-room for a glass of sherry. As it happened, we arrived before the doctor and his

wife turned up, but we were introduced to the two young women, Mrs. Dysey's relatives, who were there with Eustace and Cyril. They were somewhat unsophisticated girls, with a tendency towards blushing and giggling, but they seemed pleasant enough and their manner was in contrast to that of Thomas, who seemed to be in a mood both sour and (it seemed to me) apprehensive, now that I come to think of it."

"Indeed? That is extremely interesting. Forgive me for asking the question, but can you be sure that these were your impressions at the time? You do not think that perhaps your recollections have been coloured by Thomas's regrettable death?"

"Oh, I can answer the question very readily." He took from an inside pocket a small notebook. "I keep a 'special intentions' diary, you know." He handed her the slim little book. "You will know whereabouts to turn for the date. The book is almost full. I must remember to replace it very soon."

The vicar's calligraphy was even smaller than Dame Beatrice's own, and, like her, he used his own form of shorthand, so that many weeks of prayerful intentions took up fewer than half-a-dozen pages. It did not take her long to find, near the beginning of the notes, the entry in which she was interested.

"T. D. ora v. unq. mind." The date followed, and after the date came a tick. This was followed, in its turn, by the entry: "T. D. d. had G. R. H. S. Interment Wed." Dame Beatrice returned the book to the vicar, who stowed it carefully away.

"Yes," she said. "You did notice that he had an unquiet mind. It will be useless, I suppose, to ask whether you had any inkling..."

"As to what had disturbed him? No, I had not, nor have I to this day. Whether he foresaw his death—such things are not unknown—or whether it was some monetary or

domestic difficulty he was in, will never, I imagine, come to light, but he was most certainly distraught and ill-at-ease—more so, indeed, than his wife, whom I mentioned earlier.”

“Do you think anybody else present noticed it?”

“I could not say. My vocation necessarily makes me sensitive to emotional disturbance in others.”

“Please go on with your account of the evening.”

“Mrs. Dysey appeared, after a few minutes—I think from the kitchen where, no doubt, she had been satisfying herself that all was well with the cooking—and almost at the same time Binns and his wife were announced. They came in and were given sherry, and very soon after that we sat down to dinner. Of the conversation at table I can remember very little. After my abortive attempt to suggest that I should like to inspect the books and papers in the library, no subject was offered which was of particular interest to me, but I did my best to entertain the ladies on either side of me with one or two anecdotes of village life, and had a certain amount of success with the niece—or whatever she was—but none at all, I fear, with Mrs. Dysey.”

“You indicated that she was anxious and preoccupied?”

“Not more so, perhaps, than one would expect of an obviously inexperienced hostess. I would not like to exaggerate.”

“You said before that she seemed inexperienced in entertaining company.”

“Well, we have not much experience, ourselves, of entertaining in these days, but at home, before I married, I do not remember my mother giving high-voiced instructions to the servants while the meal was being served, nor, to the best of my recollection, did she advise my father on the best method of carving the joint. If she did, it was not in the presence of guests.”

“Did you form any opinion as to the relationship between Thomas Dysey and his wife? Were they compatible?”

"It is hardly for me to judge, but the atmosphere was not cordial. In fact, I wished my wife and I had not accepted the invitation."

"Why had the Dyseys decided to give a dinner-party?"

"For the two young women, I imagine. I can think of no other reason. When dinner was over, we all went into the hall and were invited to take turns at a game of whist. There was only one table and Thomas and Cyril declined to play, so I partnered one of the girls and the doctor the other. Then our places were taken by my wife and Eustace, and Mrs. Dysey and the doctor's wife, while the nieces removed themselves from the company after they had entertained us at the piano. As soon as the second game was over, whisky and sherry were brought in, and then the leave-taking began and was soon over. The nieces did not reappear."

"At what time was this that you left?"

"Oh, at about a quarter to ten."

"And Thomas Dysey was killed at some time after midnight. What was the last you saw of him?"

"He saw us off at the gatehouse. Binns had left his car just beside the archway and kindly offered us a lift home."

"And how did Thomas Dysey seem then?"

"Nervous, I thought, and unhospitably anxious to speed the parting guests. He kept looking up at the battlements as though he expected to see somebody up there, but this was all of a piece with his previous nervous manner."

"And that was really the last you saw of him?"

"Yes, indeed it was. Half-way home my wife discovered that she had left a silver pencil on the table which had been used for whist, but I declined to allow Binns to turn the car and go back for it, saying that we could not dream of disturbing the Dyseys again that night, but that I would send over for it the next day. Of course, I never did, because, while we were finishing a late breakfast—I am accustomed to hold a Confirmation class for half-a-dozen of the village children before they go to school, so we are often



late in breakfasting on Thursdays—Binns called with the news that he had been to the castle and that Thomas Dysey was dead.”

“Did the doctor give you any details?”

“No, not really. He told us that the police had taken charge, but he offered no further information except to say that Thomas had died of a fractured skull and had been found by the gardener at the foot of that tower which stands at the end of the kitchen garden. I asked whether he thought I could be of any help to Mrs. Dysey, but he advised me to let time pass, as she was in no state to receive visitors and that he had administered a sedative and had taken it upon himself to advise the two girls to return home as soon as they could.”

“I wonder what you would have found if you *had* gone back for your wife’s silver pencil,” Dame Beatrice remarked.

“You do not think it could possibly have made any difference to what happened, do you?”

“Most probably not. Almost certainly not, I would say. I wonder whether Mrs. Dysey ever offered any explanation of the fact that when Thomas was killed he was wearing cricketing flannels? I assume that he was not so clad when you arrived for dinner?”

“Oh, no, he was wearing a dinner jacket. The cricketing flannels have always remained a slight although a tangible mystery.”

“Did you ever hear that he had a reputation as a practical joker?”

“I should have thought it the last thing for him to have been. Of course, he may have had some macabre idea of dressing up as a ghost to scarify the two young women, whose mentality did not strike me as being of the highest order.”

“That, indeed, is a possible explanation, and we are not likely to obtain a more plausible one, but it hardly seems to coincide with his state of mind as you have described it.”

“At any rate, he could not have been killed *because* he was wearing cricketing garb.”

“You know,” said Dame Beatrice, looking searchingly at the preternaturally serious young cleric, “you may be wrong about that. White would show up in the dark.”

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### The Doctor's Story

"Said, 'Lye still, lazar, whereas thou lyeest,  
Looke thou not goe away;  
I'le make thee a whole man and a sound  
In two howres of a day.'"

*Sir Aldingar*

"I was very doubtful about accepting your invitation," said the doctor's wife, on the following evening, "but William insisted that we should."

"You have not visited the castle since the death of Thomas Dysey, I take it?" said Dame Beatrice.

"No, I haven't. William came, of course, when they sent for him after the gardener found Tom dead, and again in response to your message about finding the body of Eustace, but that was only in his professional capacity. I must repeat that I, myself, felt a good deal of doubt about coming here again. What is the meaning of these violent deaths, Dame Beatrice? Have the police got any further?"

"At present I have no means of knowing."

"I have heard that you interest yourself in such things."

"That is a very mild way of alluding to Dame Beatrice's reputation as a successful sleuth, my dear," put in the doctor, who, with Laura, was superintending the mixing of cocktails. He possessed a refrigerator and had, with foresight, brought along a thermos-jar of ice-cubes. "But *are* you going to work on the Dysey family, Dame Beatrice?"

"Yes, indeed. There are some interesting undercurrents endangering their affairs, I fancy."

"No more so than in many another family, I daresay."

"What is the exact relationship between Cyril and Henry Dysey, I wonder?"

"They are uncle and nephew by mutual consent. I think you said you preferred sherry to a cocktail?"

"Thank you. Whose son, then, is Henry?"

"He is said to be the natural son of the late Tom Dysey by a woman named Henrietta Slepe, but my father had the practice then. I was still at the teaching hospital and knew nothing about the birth. All I do know is that Mrs. Dysey must have agreed to look after the child, have him live at the castle, and bring him up."

"And how long did that go on?"

"Unfortunately, she was obliged to part with him when he was three. He turned out—so the story goes—to be incredibly vicious and to have attacked Mrs. Dysey's son Bonamy in what was described as a murderous manner. I was qualified by then, and acting as my father's assistant, and I was called in to attend Bonamy, as a matter of fact, and I drew my own conclusions."

"It was very good of you to bring the ice," said Laura, seating herself. Doctor Binns followed suit, swigged his whisky gently around in the glass and, added,

"Yes, my own conclusions, which were not quite the same as—Anyhow, Bonamy Dysey ran himself into trouble when he grew up, and had to be shipped off. Tom and Etta Dysey almost beggared themselves, I believe, to get the matter hushed up before criminal proceedings could be started, and Etta, I believe, was so angry and ashamed that, later, she had a memorial put up in the church, indicative of Bonamy's death. Personally, I am not convinced that he *is* dead. In fact, something she let fall once when I was attending her for influenza some while ago—in the spring after Tom was killed it would have been—caused me to think

that Etta badly needs the money she gets for letting the castle so that she can go and see the boy. They meet in Paris, I believe. If so, it is only since her husband's death, and must mean that she is reconciled with Bonamy."

"Does he live in France?"

"Nowadays I think he does, but, when he was first sent out of the country, I believe he went to South America, or it may have been North Africa. I just don't know."

"He is the heir to the Dysey estates, then?"

"I suppose so—if he's still alive. But, as I say, I think he must be, as Etta Dysey lets the castle for the summer months."

During dinner the conversation turned into other, more general and lighter channels. Over coffee and brandy, however, Dame Beatrice re-introduced the former theme by remarking, in a casual tone,

"Henrietta Slepe came to visit the castle the other week. She signed the Visitors' Book in the name of Henrietta Dysey."

"Really? Well, she'd no earthly right to do that," said Mrs. Binns, "unless..."

"Unless?" said her husband. "What bee have you got in your bonnet now, my dear?"

His wife smiled pityingly upon him.

"Unless she was secretly married to Eustace," she said. The doctor laughed.

"Really!" he said. "But, even if she was, that would still leave Henry out of the running. He couldn't inherit."

"He *might*, eventually, you know, dear. As things stand, if Bonamy is dead the estates come to Cyril. Failing any legal claimant, what's to stop Cyril from willing the castle to Henry? He's very fond of him."

"But we've no real proof that Bonamy *is* dead. There's nothing to go by, except that mural tablet. His death was

never announced. I'm quite convinced that he's still in the land of the living, and, if he is, he may have married and have children of his own."

"Then the deaths of Tom and Eustace don't make sense."

"They *might*, given certain conditions," said Dame Beatrice. She changed the subject slightly. "What did you mean when you said that Henry Dysey—Slepe, I suppose I should call him, but it is simpler to retain the name by which, I infer, he is generally known—that Henry Dysey, at the age of three, made *vicious* attacks upon Bonamy?"

"All I know is that I was called in to attend Bonamy for a black eye and quite severe cuts—that was the first occasion. The second—and the incident which decided the Tom Dyseys to get rid of Henry—was when they found Henry busy digging a grave."

"A grave? How did they know it was that?" asked Laura.

"Henry told them. A day or so earlier Tom had interested him (with the intention of comforting him for its loss) by conducting a burial service for a dog which had died from old age. Henry had asked what had happened to it, and was told that it had gone to heaven. He appears to have reminded them that they had told him, when he had asked, that heaven was where Bonamy had come from. The workings of the child's jealous little mind were obvious. He did not love Bonamy, so, obviously, he decided that as Bonamy had come from heaven, he, like the dog, might as well be sent back there, and the house be relieved of his unwelcome presence. One can trace the logical thought, of course."

"Poor Henry!" said Laura. Dame Beatrice nodded.

"It is a well-known pattern of behaviour," she said. "I wonder what persuaded Cyril Dysey to take the child into his care? Was he living in the chalet at the time?"

"No, he and Eustace were both living here in the castle. I have nothing really to go on except rumour—not always a

reliable guide, although I must say that I have found the old saying of no smoke without fire almost invariably turns out to be correct..."

"To cut it short," said Mrs. Binns, "it was said that Etta paid for the chalet and the river frontage out of what was left of her dowry."

"Conditional on Cyril's taking on the little boy and never allowing him inside the castle again," added the doctor.

"Ah," said Dame Beatrice, "that would account, perhaps, for the fact that Henry Dysey did not attend the dinner-party on the night when Thomas was killed."

"Oh, that dinner-party!" exclaimed Mrs. Binns, side-tracked, as Dame Beatrice had intended that she should be. "Never shall I forget it!"

"No. It is not usual, of course, to attend a dinner-party after the conclusion of which the host is killed," said Dame Beatrice.

"I didn't mean that. I meant the party itself. It was *ghastly*! Wasn't it ghastly, William?"

"I have known more agreeable functions," the doctor admitted.

"*More agreeable!* Good heavens above!"

"What was wrong with it, then?" asked Laura.

"Although, come to think of it," she added, "I can imagine that a party with Mrs. Dysey as hostess would be apt to sour upon any collection of guests."

"And *what* a collection!" Mrs. Binns cast her eyes to the ceiling. "My *dear*! When I tell you that I'm usually allergic to the clergy and their wives, but that the Charlocks were the only real human beings present except for William and me—well, I ask you!"

"What were the two girls like?—the nieces?" Laura enquired.

"Etta called them nieces, but I believe they were only second cousins. Oh, they giggled most of the time. Hopeless! Luckily we didn't see much of them when the

awful games of whist were over. They played a duet on the piano, then insisted on giving us an encore—and then they went broody because Etta wouldn't allow them to bring their transistor set into the drawing-room, so, after a bit, they retired upstairs—I suppose to turn it on in their bedroom—and that was the last we saw of them. Anyway, we and the Charlocks went home at a quarter to ten."

"I saw them on the following morning," said the doctor, "when I was called in after the gardener found Tom's body. They were in what I can only call 'studied negligée'—sexy little what-have-yous, both of 'em!—and even that morning they showed a distressing tendency to giggle. But that, of course, was probably caused by shock."

"You saw the body before the police arrived, then," said Dame Beatrice.

"Nobody had thought of sending for the police until I told 'em they'd got to, and better hurry up about it. Sending for the police involved somebody going over to the home farm to use the telephone—except for my own and the one at the post-office, there isn't another telephone for miles—and that meant a certain amount of delay, of course."

"How did they contact *you*—also by telephone from the home farm?" Dame Beatrice enquired.

"No. Bellairs came over on his bike and got me out of bed. I wasn't too pleased, I can tell you. I'd been called out at just after midnight to a confinement, and didn't get to bed again until five a.m. There was a bit of trouble with the police, incidentally, because, before I got there, Cyril and Etta had moved the body from the foot of the tower and carried it into the house. It was quite a natural thing to do, of course, but the inspector was a bit terse about it."

"So you saw the body—how long after death, would you say?" Dame Beatrice enquired.

"Oh, roughly—which, as you know, is as far as one likes to commit oneself—eight hours. Granted that the body temperature was normal at the time of death, it had



dropped just about twenty degrees by the time I examined it."

"That would indicate that death occurred at about midnight, then? Well, that fits in very well with the supposition that Thomas Dysey went to keep an assignment with his murderer very soon after he deemed that the rest of the household would be asleep. I wonder at what time they all retired to bed?"

"I couldn't say. We left, as my wife told you, with the vicar and his wife at a quarter to ten. Tom had picked them up at the vicarage in his car, so, to save him the trouble of taking them back, I offered them a lift home in mine."

"So the four of you left together, and would have parted at about...?"

"Oh, I don't know...at about ten, I suppose. They asked us to go in and offered us a cup of cocoa, but we refused."

"And then you saw Thomas Dysey's body at about eight o'clock on the following morning?"

"Yes. It wasn't a pretty sight, either. I believe you saw the body of Eustace Dysey? Well, allowing for the difference in time—the length of time they'd been dead, I mean—if you saw Eustace you've seen Tom. The injuries were remarkably similar—there was a ring-base fracture of the skull in both cases, and the intervertebral discs were crushed, in Tom's case, and, in the case of Eustace, a substantially lighter man, two of the vertebrae were compressed. In Tom's case both legs were broken, and with Eustace the left arm was fractured. Looked to me as though Tom landed on his feet and Eustace on his head."

"How much, approximately, did Thomas Dysey weigh?"

"Oh, about twelve stone."

"And Eustace?"

"Ten stone eight or nine."

"During the dinner-party did Thomas seem in any way disturbed, thoughtful, excited, upset?"

"He glowered at the two girls, but, then, who wouldn't? They nearly drove the rest of us distracted with their silly behaviour. It was most embarrassing," said Mrs. Binns.

"He was always a bit taciturn," said the doctor, "but he was unusually silent, I thought, even for him. It may have been that the two girls got on his nerves. Anyway, it's easy enough to imagine things after a violent death, and I may be mistaken in thinking that he must have had something on his mind, for it was only afterwards that I thought so. It did not occur to me at the time, particularly."

"I thought Etta was rather keeping an eye on him," said Mrs. Binns, "but, again, that may be my imagination. Anyway, take it for all in all, it wasn't *my* idea of a successful party, and I was glad to come away. Are you staying here much longer, Dame Beatrice?"

"Until the end of October."

"I wonder what will happen when you go?"

"In what way do you mean?"

"Well, I suppose Etta hasn't any real right to go on living here. The place belongs to Bonamy, if he's alive, and to Cyril if Bonamy is dead. Of course, William and I don't think he *is* dead, but, all the same, there's that memorial tablet to him in the church."

"And you base your assumption that he is not dead chiefly upon the fact that Mrs. Dysey lets the castle for three months in every year, and presumably goes abroad to see her son. Did Thomas go with her?"

"No. She did not let the castle, or go abroad, while Thomas was alive."

"Then, after her husband's death, when she *did* let the castle, what did Eustace do?"

"He went away. The theory was that he stayed at his London club or went to some seaside place—Eastbourne, so I heard from someone—but there are also rumours that he was often spotted in or around the castle, or up on the

battlements, you know. He was rather an odd sort of person."

"That is remarkably interesting," said Dame Beatrice. "I must get in touch with others who have rented the castle."

"With others who have rented the castle?" said Mrs. Binns. "Why should you want to do that?"

"I should like to compare their experiences with ours. We think that, before his death, Eustace not only haunted us, but stole our food."

"How extraordinary! Do tell us all about it!"

Dame Beatrice did this.

"A priest's hole?" said the doctor, when she had finished her account. "Yes, I heard about that. I should very much like to see it. I suppose...?"

"By all means. We need an electric torch. If you will excuse me for one moment, I will go and get one."

"Well, these visits don't get us much further, do they?" commented Laura, when the guests had gone. Her own share in the last part of the proceedings had been the humble but necessary one of standing on the counterpoise to keep the door into the panelling open.

"There were the interesting tidings that Mrs. Dysey, having taken his disgrace very much to heart, later became reconciled with her son. There is also the assumption that Henry is Thomas Dysey's son by an illicit union, and the fact that the child is often father to the man."

Laura looked at her enquiringly.

"As how, in the present case?" she demanded. "Do you mean Henry and his murderous instincts? I don't believe that. Plenty of quite normal kids hate it when a new baby comes into the house. You can't blame Henry for what he did at the age of three."

"Very true. But the doctor, I thought, had doubts about Henry's guilt. I wonder at what point Henry was told that he was illegitimate? And whether he was the older child?"

"I don't suppose we shall ever know that. But, supposing (as I think you're suggesting) that if and when he was told, the knowledge soured on him, I can see why he may have killed Tom, if Tom was his natural father, but what can he have had against Eustace?"

"Time may show. I wonder why those two young girls behaved so very badly?"

"Had something up their sleeves would be my guess."

"You speak from experience, perhaps?"

Laura grinned.

"Your guess is as good as mine," she said. "The fact remains that the doctor and his wife seem to have got heartily sick of them and were thankful when they took themselves upstairs to listen to pop music, or whatever it was, and perhaps the Dyseys were glad to see the back of them, too. I know that at school—yes, and I even seem to remember an occasion at college—one had only to make oneself sufficiently obnoxious in class to get chucked out. It was a wheeze to be used with caution, of course, because, if you went the whole hog too often, you were apt to be sent up to the Head instead of being able to smoke a surreptitious dog-end in the shrubbery or sneak away and catch up on your homework, but it usually worked extremely well."

"You think, then, that the girls had some end in view? You would not care to hazard a guess, out of your special knowledge, as to what it was?"

"Well, there *was* the uninvited Henry languishing all alone at the chalet, wasn't there?"

"Ah!" said Dame Beatrice. She gazed admiringly at her secretary. "What a boon, I perceive, is a mis-spent youth! I did not think of their going to the chalet—and even if I *had* thought of it, I should have concluded that they would not have found Henry there."

"No," said Laura thoughtfully. "There are times in a man's life when a health-giving pint at the local is more to

be desired than any amount of sporting with Amaryllis, whether in the shade or otherwise."

"That was not quite what I meant," said Dame Beatrice, "but you may well be right." There was silence for a minute or two. Then Laura said,

"The doctor didn't commit himself much, did he? I was thinking about the parentage of Henry. It seemed to me that he was stalling. There was more than a hint of the crime reporter's cautious 'it is alleged' about his remarks, it seemed to me."

"Neither did he tell us whether Henry or Bonamy is the older," said Dame Beatrice, who seemed to think it important.

"I thought we knew Henry was."

"That might need to be proved, you know."

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### The Foolish Virgin

“O I forbid you, maidens a’,  
That wear gowd on your hair,  
To come or gae by Carterhaugh,  
For young Tam Lin is there.

“For even about that knight’s middle  
O’ siller bells are nine;  
And nae maid comes to Carterhaugh  
And a maid returns again.”

*Tam Lin*

“Give you Gina’s and Peggy’s address?” said Mrs. Dysey.  
“Well, yes, I *can*, of course, but I can’t see why you want it.  
You haven’t met them, have you?”

“No,” said Laura, who had volunteered to go over to the home farm and make contact with Mrs. Dysey. “We think they may be able to help us, that’s all.”

“In what way help you? Help you over what?”

“Help us to solve the problem of your husband’s death. You do want it solved, don’t you?”

“But there is nothing to solve. You know what the verdict was.”

“And are you satisfied with it?”

“Well,” said Mrs. Dysey, “if you’d found yourself under suspicion of having killed your husband, wouldn’t *you* be

satisfied with a verdict of death by misadventure, or whatever it was?"

"No," said Laura, very firmly indeed, "I most certainly should not. If my husband was killed like that, I shouldn't rest until I'd found out all about it."

"Maybe you love your husband," said Mrs. Dysey, with a short, bitter laugh. "That would make a difference, no doubt."

"So you don't want to give me the address of those two girls?"

"Oh, I have no objection. You could get it from the police, I suppose, if I refused to give it you. But it won't do you any good, you know. You had much better leave things as they are. But there! As a policeman's wife I suppose you're inured to muckraking into other people's business. As for that precious employer of yours, the less said about *her* the better."

"For the first and only time, I agree with you," said Laura. "So kindly keep your opinion of Dame Beatrice to yourself."

"Are you threatening me?"

"Oh, no," said Laura, calmly. "It is quite ridiculous to threaten people. Actions speak louder than words." She flexed her fingers, gazed down at a large and shapely palm, and then looked fixedly at Mrs. Dysey. Mrs. Dysey involuntarily put her own hand up to her cheek. "Exactly," said Laura, pleasantly. She turned away.

"I'll write it down for you," said Mrs. Dysey. "Don't go. I won't be a minute." She almost ran out of the room.

"I don't know whether I would have dotted her one," said Laura to her employer when she had returned to the castle with Gina's and Peggy's address. "I'm glad she didn't force the issue. A bit awkward for Gavin if I were had up for

assault and battery. When do we go and interview this moronic pair of sirens?"

"I will write to them and find out."

"And while we're waiting for their answer?"

"Masterly inactivity, as I believe I have heard it called. Henri and Celestine arrive on the four-thirty. George will meet them with the car. I am retaining Zena's services until further notice."

"You don't mean she's going back with us when our lease of the castle runs out?"

"Such is my intention."

"I thought she was going into service with Cyril Dysey."

"So did Cyril Dysey, but I have persuaded Zena that her interests will best be served if she remains with us."

"Does Cyril know?"

"Not yet. In any case, he will have other things to occupy his mind before we go home."

"Why have you decided to take on Zena? There's something behind all this. Besides, what are Henri and Celestine going to say about it?"

"To reply categorically to your questions, although in reverse order, Celestine can do with some help at the Stone House, and I have decided to take on Zena as the only means which occur to me at the moment of preventing her from entering Cyril Dysey's service."

"Oh? I shouldn't have placed Cyril in the big bad wolf category."

"Neither should I. I am thinking along entirely different lines. Anyhow, I prefer to keep the girl under my own eye. Do you forget that she is native to this countryside?"

"I know she is. I can't see it makes much difference. She can't have knowledge of anything which would incriminate anybody, can she?"

"Probably not, but, if she has, she can unfold it to me, not to the Dyseys. And now for the Misses Wick."

"Do you want me to draft a letter?"



"I think not. It may be better, after all, to take them by surprise. Order the car for nine o'clock tomorrow morning. We will take our chance of finding them at home."

"I expect they go out to work, you know. They wouldn't be at home at the time we should get there."

"Very true. Order the car for nine o'clock, just the same."

The journey took just over an hour, and the clocks stood at ten minutes past ten when George pulled up in the car-park and came round to open the door for Dame Beatrice to get out.

"I do not know how long we are likely to be, George," she said. "If we are not back by half-past twelve, go and get yourself some lunch."

"Very good, madam."

He closed the door of the car and resumed his seat at the wheel. Dame Beatrice and Laura walked out of the car park, found a policeman, and asked the way to the street they wanted. It was not far away, and by twenty-five minutes past ten Laura was ringing the bell of a squarely-built detached house of late-nineteenth-century appearance. A middle-aged woman wearing a flowered overall and holding a mop answered the door.

"Mrs. Wick's just gone shopping, won't be long, Miss Peggy's at work and Miss Gina's in bed with a cold, you can go on up if you don't mind catching it, I got to get on, only here 'til eleven," said the apparition, breathlessly. A youthful voice from upstairs called out,

"Who is it, Mrs. Adams?"

"Dame Beatrice Lestranger Bradley and secretary," said Laura to the woman.

"Dame Bradley and seckerterry," called Mrs. Adams.

"You better go straight up," she added to the visitors, "else

she'll only catch 'er death, sparrin' about on that draughty landin'."

Dame Beatrice and Laura mounted the staircase and encountered a girl in her early twenties. She was wearing a transparent housecoat over 'shortie' pyjamas and she gave a squeak of dismay when she saw the visitors.

"But I don't know you!" she said. "What—what are you doing in this house?"

Dame Beatrice produced a visiting card.

"I am accredited to the Home Office in the capacity of psychiatric consultant," she said, in her beautiful voice. "On the present occasion I am assisting the police to unravel the mystery of the so-far unexplained deaths of Mr. Thomas and Mr. Eustace Dysey, to whom, I believe, you bear relationship."

"Oh, dear! I thought that was all over and done with long ago! The police questioned us. We couldn't tell them anything."

"Had you not better get back into bed?" asked Dame Beatrice. The girl giggled.

"I haven't really got a cold," she confessed. "I just didn't feel like going to the office this morning. If you don't mind waiting a minute, I'll get some clothes on. I wish my mother would come home!"

She retreated into a bedroom and shut the door, re-appearing in a miraculously short time dressed in trousers and a hip-length jacket. As the top of the shortie pyjamas was now doing duty as a blouse or shirt, there was ample explanation of the speed with which the girl had dressed. She leaned over the banisters and called out,

"Have you done the lounge, Mrs. Adams?"

"Just finished it!" the daily help returned in trumpet tones. "Be you a-comin' down?"

"Yes. Put the electric fire on."

"Shall I make you a cup of tea?"

"No, three cups of coffee."

"Instant sort?"

"Yes, of course. Come on down," she added, to the visitors. The lounge was a large, square room, comfortably furnished, and the electric fire was a new one. "Sit down," went on the girl. "I suppose it's Uncle Eustace's death that has brought it all up again?"

"Yes, indeed," Dame Beatrice replied. "Whatever the rights or wrongs of Mr. Thomas's death, there can be no doubt that Mr. Eustace was murdered."

"That's what we thought."

"You seem to take the matter calmly."

"No other way to take it. Anyway, it's no good for you to think any of us here can tell you anything."

"About the death of Mr. Eustace? I know you cannot, unless you can suggest any reason why anybody should have desired it."

"Aunt Etta would be the only one. She hated him like poison. But however much she desired it, as you say, she wouldn't have done it. I'm absolutely sure of that. Besides, she was abroad at the time."

"Can you be sure of that, I wonder?"

"Well, we had picture postcards from her. It's only in books that people alibi themselves by getting other people to post their letters and things on a certain date, isn't it?"

"How clear is your recollection of the events which took place on the occasion of your last visit to Dysey Castle?" asked Dame Beatrice, ignoring the postcards.

"Very clear. Peg and I have talked so much about it that I couldn't forget, even if I tried."

"I wonder whether you will be good enough to give me an account of how you spent the evening of the dinner-party?"

"Oh, well, we were a bit browned-off about that dinner-party. The people were all so stuffy."

"The people being...?"

"Oh, Uncle Thomas and Aunt Etta, of course, and Uncle Eustace and Uncle Cyril, and the doctor and his wife and the vicar and the vicaress. *She* might have been all right, but *he* wasn't. I mean, you can't have much fun with a vicar, can you? We did think Aunt and Uncle might have invited a young man or two, but I don't suppose they knew any."

"There was your cousin, was there not?"

"Oh, we don't count Henry as a cousin." She giggled wildly. "And poor old Bonamy, of course, is dead."

"Dead? Can you be sure of that?"

"Well, I never quite believed it, you know. He did something pretty awful—we were never told what it was—and had to be sent abroad, and then we heard he'd died of fever or something. There's a memorial to him in the church. Aunt Etta had it put up soon after he was sent away."

"Had you any *reason* for disbelieving the story that your cousin was dead?"

"Not really. It just seemed a bit too neat, that's all. I mean, it's never the bad eggs who cop out, is it? Only the decent people die. That's my experience." She giggled again, oblivious of Laura's scowling countenance.

"Finding the dinner-party disappointing, how did you and your sister spend the rest of the evening?" asked Dame Beatrice.

"Oh, we walked over to the home farm and stayed a couple of hours. Jerry Carter saw us back to the castle."

"Ah, yes. It would have been dark by then, I suppose."

"Darkish, anyway. There was a moon, of course."

"Did young Mr. Carter enter the castle with you?"

"Oh, no. Jerry's ever so shy. A real country bumpkin of a boy. Of course, he wasn't married then. He married about three months later. He's got a bouncing baby boy, too. We wanted to be godmothers, but only one of us could be, so, short of tossing up for it, which didn't seem quite the thing,

we let it go. Of course, Jerry and his wife might not have wanted us, anyway."

"You saw nothing, then, of Mr. Henry Dysey, on that evening of the dinner-party?"

"Oh, yes, of course we did. He was at the home farm, too."

"By pre-arrangement?"

"How do you mean?"

"Did you know he was going to be there?"

"No. How could we?"

"But he did not escort you back to the castle?"

"No, the lazy brute! He said *he* wasn't going to fag. It was quite far enough to walk back to the chalet from the farm, without the sweat of going to the castle first. Actually, I think he was a bit narked at not being invited to the dinner, although I don't see how he could expect to be."

"Are you sure he was not invited? It seems strange to have left him out."

"Not a bit of it! Uncle Tom couldn't *stand* him. Mummy knows the reason, but she won't tell us what it is. So stuffy of her, because I'm sure it's something scandalous, and I do so adore a breath of scandal. Oh, here *is* Mummy! I'm downstairs, darling! In the lounge! I've got visitors!"

A middle-aged woman, wearing a tweed coat and a felt hat, came in, followed by Mrs. Adams, who was carrying three cups of coffee on a tray.

"I better make *you* one before I go, I s'pose," she said to her employer, as she set down the tray.

"No, don't bother. I had one in the town," said Mrs. Wick. Gina introduced Dame Beatrice and Laura.

"They want to know about Uncle Tom and Uncle Eustace," she explained, "but there's nothing much I can tell them. They're not the police, but they belong to the Home Office."

A shout of, "Well, I'm orf," from Mrs. Adams, and the slamming of the front door, interrupted Mrs. Wick's

comment on this information.

"What did you think my daughter could tell you?" she enquired, in none too friendly a tone. "Her father won't be very pleased at having everything raked up again. Gina was only eighteen and Peggy sixteen at the time. They were much too young to be mixed up with the police."

"Oh, Mummy, it was quite fun! And it wasn't as though we knew Uncle Tom all that well, or liked him all that much. And, anyway, it was proved to have been somebody unknown, or an accident of some sort, wasn't it?"

"It was all very worrying to your father and me that you should have been in the castle at the time." She turned to Dame Beatrice. "Oh, dear! So now the bother is going to start all over again! But what help can you expect from Gina? She knows nothing except what she has read in the papers, and that was little enough."

"I wonder, Mrs. Wick, whether I may ask what may seem to be an impertinent question?" enquired Dame Beatrice.

"I suppose I don't have to answer it," Mrs. Wick retorted.

"How nearly is your family related to the Dyseys?"

"Oh, that! I thought you were going to ask me something else. My mother was cousin to Etta Dysey's mother."

"So that under no circumstances would you or your daughters have expectations under a Dysey will?"

"Good gracious, no, of course we shouldn't! In any case, I don't know what the Dyseys would have to leave, except that white elephant of a castle and the land that goes with it—unless, of course, the Ravens' Hoard, as it's called, ever turns up again."

"The Ravens' Hoard?"

"Yes. There's an old story—I heard it from Tom one Christmas, but even *he* didn't really believe it—that Dysey Castle was made the repository for a very large amount of

Jesuit treasure which was never claimed—although how that could be, I haven't the slightest idea."

"Oh, it would be quite possible," said Laura. "The money would be intended to further the work of the Jesuits in England, but I expect the Order was proscribed before it was all spent. After that, the money wouldn't be touched, you see, because no one person could lay claim to it. The Order was disbanded by Clement XIV in 1773, after being turned out of England in 1604. By the time it was re-established I suppose the story of the Dysey treasure had become a sort of myth and nobody believed it any more, or else they concluded that the Dyseys had spent it."

"Interesting," remarked Dame Beatrice. "I must thank you for the story of the treasure, Mrs. Wick, and Miss Wick for her helpful information. I wonder whether I might talk to your younger daughter when she returns home?"

"No, that you certainly may not!" said Mrs. Wick, with asperity. "I absolutely forbid you to get in touch with Peggy. She can add nothing to what Gina has told you, and I will not have all that dreadful business raked up again! I'm sorry, but there it is. Peggy was an innocent child. She was led astray, and I won't have her reminded of that night."

"In that case," said Dame Beatrice, rising, "I am sorry I suggested it. I had no idea that anything of *that* nature was involved."

"Well, it was," said Mrs. Wick. "It was that wretched Henry, of course! We had to take steps—I need not say more!"

"Of course not," Dame Beatrice agreed. Gina, true to her reputation, giggled.

"I wouldn't have called Peg all that innocent!" she said.

"Really, Gina!" protested her mother. "Please see your visitors to the front door."

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### The Ravens' Hoard

"And he bred up that bonny boy,  
Call'd him his sister's son;  
And he thought nae eye could ever see  
The deed that had been done."

*Jellon Grame*

"How rotten for Mrs. Wick!" said Laura, as they walked back towards the car park. "I suppose they're sure it was Henry? Personally, I wouldn't put it past Cyril. I suppose he's the next person we have to tackle about Tom Dysey's death? I don't look forward to it much."

"I think we should also question Henry. We must see them separately, Cyril first. But before we do that, I confess to some curiosity concerning the Ravens' Hoard."

"Yes, stories of treasure are always interesting. Think there might be something in that eighteenth-century journal you sorted out for Hamish?"

"It is not unlikely. The Jesuit Order was disbanded in 1773, you say, but the Society was expelled from England as early as 1604?"

"Yes, officially, but that's not to say all the members went, you know. In fact, I should guess it's fairly certain they did not. That's where the hiding-places like the one in Dysey Castle would come in handy. It would have been constructed during the reign of Elizabeth I and it probably went on being used for many years after that."



“I wonder when the Dyseys gave up the Catholic faith?”  
“Perhaps Cyril knows. It might make a talking-point.”

Before tackling Cyril Dysey, Dame Beatrice spent three days in close inspection of the library. It contained a good deal of rubbish in the form of unreadable and, she would have thought, unpreachable sermons. There were also some bound copies of extremely dull Victorian magazines with a semi-religious bias, as well as more interesting material in the form of some enormous volumes of the *Boys' Own Paper*, text books on aero-dynamics, mathematics, and physics, an interesting collection of cookery books dating from the seventeenth century to Mrs. Beeton, volumes of the Victoria County Histories and a set of those works by Rudyard Kipling which were published in the uniform edition of 1900. Dickens and Sir Walter Scott were represented in bulk, and there were a number of books, many of them by authors long forgotten, published at prices varying from sixteen shillings to a humble one and sixpence by Bliss, Sands and Company of 12 Burleigh Street, Strand, London.

Dame Beatrice took down one or two of these. *Men, Cities and Events*, by Wm. Beatty-Kingston. *The Best Cruise on the Broads, With useful hints on Hiring, Provisioning and Manning the Yacht; Clothing, Angling, Photography, etc.*, by John Bickersdyke. *A Winter Jaunt to Norway* by Mrs. Alec Tweedie, author of *A Girl's Ride in Iceland*.

“Fascinating,” said Dame Beatrice aloud. “How do you suppose they did it at the price?”

“Did what?” asked Laura, who was inditing a letter to her husband describing her encounters with Mrs. Dysey, the vicar, the doctor, and the Wick mother and her elder daughter. “Oh, sold books? Cheap labour, I suppose. Have you found anything interesting?”

“Interesting, yes. Germane to our purpose, no.”

"I'll come and help. I'm getting sick to death of this letter. There seems an awful lot of it, but you say we have to keep Gavin up-to-date with our discoveries. Not that I can see they amount to much, so far, but..."

"I am far from feeling discouraged. Consider the evidence that we have already obtained."

"I have considered it. I can't see it gets us very much further."

"Oh, but, think! From the vicar's wife we learn that some people in the village thought that Mr. Thomas Dysey's death was a suicide, and that another faction held the opinion that he had been murdered, not by person or persons unknown, but to secure the inheritance for Eustace, the rightful claimant."

"Well, that theory has been knocked on the head now that Eustace has been murdered, and there's no evidence whatever that Tom was illegitimate. They've got him mixed up with Henry."

"I think you are right about that. Thomas and his wife do not seem to have been popular in the village, so there were bound to be scandalous rumours."

"It was interesting about the living being alternately given and sold, wasn't it?"

"Yes, indeed. Another interesting point is that the Reverend Mr. Charlock did not at first remember that there was anything amiss with Thomas on that evening, but that, upon reflection, he did, and has proved to us conclusively that he did, and that this conviction of his was not an afterthought. Then we were assured, not only of the existence of Mrs. Dysey's son, but that he was probably still alive. I take it that you had not noticed the tablet commemorating Bonamy's death when you took Hamish to church during his stay here?"

"No, I hadn't. I don't take any stock in memorial tablets unless they're mediaeval brasses or those oddly comic Elizabethan and Early Stuart horrors. I suppose Mrs. Dysey

was so fed up with Bonamy's lapse from grace—whatever it was—that, to her, he was as good as dead when the disgrace was made public."

"It seems likely, unless he really *is* dead."

"Oh, he'll crop up again. They always do. Read any good book," said Laura.

"Then," Dame Beatrice went on, declining to take advantage of this suggestion, "there is the surprising business of the dinner-party."

"Oh, I don't know that it was particularly surprising in itself," Laura objected. "I suppose they had to think of something to entertain those regrettable girls."

"And you think that the best they could do, in that respect, was to pass over two unattached young men (for the farmer's son, Carter, was not then married) and to favour two married couples?"

"Well, one can understand why Henry wasn't invited, and the Dyseys probably thought Carter wasn't good enough to make castle company."

"Very likely. There remains the fact that the Dyseys had already cold-shouldered the vicar and, in any case, seem to have shunned all forms of entertaining. I hardly think they would have put themselves out for a couple of obscure relatives. Still, one never knows. It may be, of course, that the vicar and his wife were invited because the Chief Constable could not, or would not, come, and that the invitation to the doctor was to make sure of having medical aid at hand. That, to me, has a curious ring."

"But they didn't have it at hand. The doctor left more than two hours before Tom Dysey was killed."

"I know. It is all very puzzling. So is the inference that neither Bonamy nor Henry was born at the castle. It was clear, I thought, that Doctor Binns's father was present at neither birth. I find that extremely odd."

"I don't. They'd have been born in a nursing home, of course."

"Oh, yes, very likely. Of course, one might possibly assume, bearing in mind the two deaths and the story of the Ravens' Hoard—but, no, it is all very puzzling."

Laura stared hard at her employer.

"Meaning that you are not in the least puzzled, and that you know who the murderer is," she said. "Well, I don't know what *you* think, but Cyril Dysey comes pretty high on my list. If Bonamy is dead, Cyril scoops the pool."

"Then there is Henry, of course."

"But he'd have to kill Cyril and (if he's still alive) Bonamy, if he wants to inherit. Even then, if he's illegitimate, his chance is a slender one, I should have thought. Wouldn't young Carter have a claim if his father is descended from a Dysey?"

"Yes, I think he would, but the murderer may not realise that. Let us continue to assemble and inspect what more we have gathered which may help us to a just and final conclusion."

"Well, I don't know what it indicates, except bad manners on their part, but there was that business of the two girls making themselves scarce as soon as they could after dinner. I wonder at what time they got back after seeing Henry and young Carter?"

"It might be very interesting to know."

"Especially if Henry is the murderer. Couldn't he have escorted them back to the castle and then lurked about until he got Tom on to the battlements, or up on that gallery in the keep?"

"It is not impossible."

"Meaning you don't think it's very likely. Of course, the snag about fixing on Henry as the murderer is the utter unlikelihood that Tom would be making secret assignments with him at midnight. It really seems a very far-fetched idea, that."

"There are the cricketing flannels to be accounted for, too."

"Yes, the ghost theory seems a bit thin, when one really thinks it over. Playing practical jokes of that sort is a boy's or a young man's idea of being funny. It wouldn't normally appeal to anybody as old as Tom Dysey. I mean, he must have been at least in his early, middle, or late fifties, if Eustace and Cyril were his younger brothers."

"Very true. What other conclusions have you arrived at?"

"None, so far as I know. Of course, there's that peculiar woman who pinched the pound note from the battlements and left the change, but I should simply call her a bit deranged."

"Deranged or not, she seems to be Henry Dysey's mother and calls herself Henrietta Dysey. She may be determined to eliminate all those who stand between Henry and what, no doubt, she may consider his right to the Dysey property."

"Then she must believe that Bonamy Dysey is dead."

"Or disinherited. I have paid insufficient attention, so far, to the family archives, but one thing seems to be certain. The property has never been entailed."

"But that means it could be left to simply anybody. It needn't go to a member of the family at all."

"That is true, but only to a limited extent. The family, if the estates were willed away from them, would have a strong case, I fancy, if the matter were taken before the courts."

"But if Mrs. Dysey is as poor as people seem to think, she couldn't afford to go to law, could she?"

"You have a point there, no doubt. What did you think of the story of the Jesuit treasure?"

"Not much. If ever there was such a thing as the Ravens' Hoard, I should say that it disappeared long ago."

"Yet the Dysey estates, in themselves, are almost worthless."

"All the more reason why Mrs. Dysey shouldn't bother to go to law about them, if they *have* been left outside the family. What about my popping up to Somerset House and taking a gander at Tom Dysey's will?"

"It is too soon for that."

"I say, I suppose this Henrietta Slepe woman really *is* Henry's mother? If she is, why didn't Cyril marry *her* instead of his housekeeper? Then she could at least have helped to bring Henry up and look after him."

"Perhaps, as you suggest, she is not Henry's mother, or perhaps Cyril Dysey preferred the housekeeper, dear child."

"Yes, perhaps, although she seems to be a bit of a doormat, I thought. Hardly the honoured mistress of the chalet, would you say?"

"The doormat wife is not unknown, even when the contracting parties are of equal birth. However, no matter who brought Henry up, he appears to have outgrown his youthful jealousies and passions, and to be a notably good-natured and equable young man."

"Unless he is our murderer."

"Unless, as you say, he is our murderer."

"Well, he did climb to the battlements in that suspicious and unnecessary way when Gavin spotted him that time. Although I can see you're trying to put me off, I still think he's a pretty hot suspect, you know."

"Oh, I shall not leave him out of my calculations," said Dame Beatrice, "particularly if he proves to be younger than Bonamy."

"I can't see what that has to do with it. Anyway, if Mrs. Wick is right, he did let down the younger of those two nieces when she was only sixteen."

"Yes, Henry was the obvious choice for a scapegoat there."

"I did just wonder the same thing myself. With girls as silly as those two, it could have been anybody, you mean."

All right, we'll acquit Henry of that, for the time being—or, at any rate, keep an open mind about it."

"We can put it completely out of our minds for all time, I think," said Dame Beatrice. "However reprehensible it may have been in itself—and public opinion, I notice (unlike my own), becomes more and more uncertain on the point—it can have no conceivable bearing on the subject at issue."

"A Freudian, unconscious selection of words germane to the said subject, or a series of regrettable puns?" Laura enquired. "Never mind. Let it go. In your case, I take leave to doubt whether it was either, so, passing lightly on, as they say, suppose you do the next bit of our *précis*. Personally, I never could see the use or purpose of that particular exercise. *Précis*-writing, I mean. One assumes that people say what they have to say in the requisite number of words. If they are unnecessarily verbose, why should perfect strangers, probably no better at English, have to correct them? Anyway, ignoring all that—which, no doubt, you *have* done—you seem to have changed your mind about Henry Dysey. After the doctor and his wife had gone from here, you said, speaking of Henry and his childhood hatred of Bonamy, that the child was father of the man, but now you seem to be completely white-washing the lad."

"I have had time to think things over," Dame Beatrice meekly replied. Laura snorted, and was about to return to the attack when Dame Beatrice added, "And you yourself, I seem to remember, corrected me by remarking that all young children tend to resent the presence of a new baby in the house. This is largely true, and I accepted your rebuke with all proper humility."

"One thing," said Laura, "that knocks on the head a previous theory that Henry brought those girls back that night from the home farm, is awful Gina's report that it was young Carter who escorted them. The only thing is that I don't believe her. That was an obvious lie she told when she said there was no pre-arrangement that Henry would be at

the home farm while the dinner-party was on. Why should he have been there if it *wasn't* prearranged? Personally, I don't believe it was to the home farm they went, but to the chalet."

"I might agree with you but for the fact that the chalet is a long way from the castle, and a very rough walk after dark, and also nobody could be sure that Cyril Dysey would not come home."

"Yes, but I thought it was definite that he spent the night at the castle. Well, I take it that's about as far as we can get with our summing-up until we hear what Cyril and Henry have to say. I must say that, so far, I find it discouraging to think how little we've managed to find out."

Dame Beatrice took up another volume and looked at the title.

"Why do you suppose the Reverend H. R. Haweis—surely a most unusual name?—author of *Music and Morals*, *Travel and Talk*, etc., chose to call his volume of sermons *The Dead Pulpit*?" she asked.

"Goodness knows. Foreseeing the readers' comments, perhaps." Laura pushed aside her letter and came over to the book-shelves. "I should think the Dyseys must have had shares in Bliss, Sands," she observed, scanning the shelf which was engaging her employer's attention. "What about this for a bromide—*A Tale of the Thames. A Novel*. It's by J. Ashby-Sterry, author of *A Naughty Girl*, *The Lazy Minstrel*, etc. etc. A busy man, J. Ashby-Sterry. Do you suppose the book can be slightly improper? It was published at six shillings, a whale of a price, I should have thought, in 1890 or thereabouts. Look here, I'll rummage, shall I, while you get down to the family archives? What am I looking for—a will disinheriting Cyril?"

"That would be too much to expect, and, except for the fact that testamentary depositions are almost invariably interesting, it would also be of little use in furthering our present enquiry. Family memoirs or old letters referring to



the Ravens' Hoard are what I hope to light upon, apart from any references to the priest's hole."

"But that wouldn't advance the enquiry either, would it?—reading about the Ravens' Hoard, I mean?"

"It might explain why Eustace Dysey kept vigil here, don't you think? He must have had *some* good reason for affecting to visit Eastbourne while, all the time, he was in residence at the castle."

"It might help to explain his death, too, perhaps. You don't think he'd discovered the Hoard, do you?—and that the murderer knew that he had? If so, that seems to bring it back to Cyril."

Dame Beatrice did not respond to these remarks. She seated herself at the table, put Laura's unfinished letter aside, and settled down with the one attempt at authorship upon which the Dysey family appeared to have embarked. There was silence in the library for the next half hour or so, except for some *sotto voce* observations from Laura as she took out, inspected, and replaced books, and an occasional slight sound as Dame Beatrice turned a page of the Dysey memoirs.

These dated from 1746 and ignored the general course of English history except for a reference to the extinction of Stuart hopes in the failure of the second Jacobite rebellion..."I hear the Earl of Kellie is kept in Edinburgh Castle. I met him once, I believe, at Mr. Dickson's, but thought him not much in either fortune or understanding"... and, in 1762, in feebler penmanship and very difficult to decipher:

Tom Jenkins is come home from the wars without his right leg which he lost at Dettingen against the French. He will expect some employment from me. They say a Naval Officer, a clergyman's son, has turned highwayman and

is to be lodged in Newgate. I am to have the company of Brother Tom and Sister Jane this Christmas, but I doubt of the meeting being a happy one, as Tom is plagued with the Itch, which is as much a Disease with him as the Scurvy. However, he shall hear nothing from me to his Advantage. Upon that I am resolved.

Dame Beatrice re-read this entry and then addressed herself to Laura.

"Come and tell me what you make of this," she said, showing her the paragraph.

"Sounds a bit like Cassius's itching palm. Do you suppose it can possibly be a reference to the Hoard?" Laura enquired. "Worth reading on a bit, don't you think?"

Dame Beatrice read on, pursuing her studies with extreme diligence but to no helpful end. The Christmas Day entry ran:

A great deal of rain fell all day and we was confined to the house. Tom, after family Dinner which we took at three o'clock, proposed Hide and Seek, which he said his little Boy would enjoy. The child being entered only into his 3. Year, I said I was doubtful of it, so we got to Loo, at which I won 0.3.0. Being disagreeably inclined at losing and also, I believe, very uneasy on account of his Suspicions I know where it lies and am in mind to keep him from it, Tom spoke severely to the Child and beat him on the ear, which caused an Upset with Sister Jane. Found myself very low for the rest of the Afternoon and glad to sup and get to my bed.

“Well, it sounds as though the Ravens’ Hoard was thought to be in existence in 1762,” said Laura. “Does he have any more to say about it?”

“No. He seems to have died in the following year. The next entry is in a slightly different hand. It reads:

Buried poor Henry. Susan gave us a good plain dinner and after it a bowl of warm negus, then to bed. Young Bonamy sad and silent. I rallied him on being a bad member of society, to which he replied that he should not so much care for that as for dropping asps in their own venom to know whether they died or thrived of it. I lamented to his mother that I did not understand him, but supposed him to be suffering from the loss of his father, to which she replied that he was confused and thrown loose for love of him and knew not what he said.

The Ravens’ Hoard is not mentioned.”

“It doesn’t help much,” said Laura, “except that there’s a smack of Hamlet about it.”

“Or, of course, a smack of Hamlet’s uncle. Can poor Henry have been murdered by the asp, do you suppose? It is interesting how family baptismal names persist.”

“Perhaps murder, like red hair and green fingers, runs in families, too,” said Laura. “That’s what it looks like, anyway.”

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### Cyril Departs in Haste

“‘O when will ye come hame again?  
Dear Willie, tell to me!’  
‘When the sun and moon dance on yon green:  
And that will never be!’”

*The Twa Brothers*

Following the discovery of Eustace Dysey’s body, Laura had given up her daily swim in the Dysey lake. She would have found it difficult to give a reason for this, had she been asked for one, but Dame Beatrice put no questions.

Finding that the light from an oil lamp was insufficient to make further perusal of the Dysey diaries anything but a strain on the eyes, she and Laura gave up their researches into the possible hiding-place of the Ravens’ Hoard and went to bed even earlier than usual that night, so that, before dawn on the following morning, Laura was wide awake and restless for action.

She got up and prowled round the house, stood on the trap-door which opened the way to the priest’s hole, and scowled in the half-light, and in a frustrated manner, at the aperture which she could not enter. Then she decided to walk over to the home farm, where she could at least look at the pigs and perhaps bring back some eggs. There was almost always somebody about with whom she could pass the time of day—Jerry, his father, his wife, or his mother, but more often she merely found Bellairs sluicing himself under

the pump preparatory to setting out for the castle to commence his duties. It was Bellairs she met on this occasion, and when he had finished his ablutions they walked back to the castle together.

"Bellairs," said Laura, on impulse, her mind being full of the matter, "have you ever heard of the Ravens' Hoard?"

"Oh, that old matter!" said the gardener contemptuously.

"You have, then?"

"Everybody that know of the Dyseys have heard tell of the Ravens' Hoard, Mrs. Gavin, mam, but that be nowt but an old wives' tale, I reckon."

"Yes, I suppose it is, but there must have been something of the kind once upon a time, otherwise there would be no mention of it."

"I hear the inquest on poor Mr. Eustace is put off while they police does a bit more ferretin' round," said Bellairs, pursuing what was to him a more interesting theme.

"It's the usual thing in a case of murder, unless the coroner's jury actually name the murderer," said Laura.

"Ar."

They walked on in silence until Laura said,

"Why don't you want to talk about the Ravens' Hoard?"

"Me, Mrs. Gavin, mam?"

"Yes. You changed the subject pretty quickly, I noticed."

"I thought we'd done with en."

"Did it ever occur to you that Mr. Eustace may have been on the track of it when somebody killed him?"

"Why, no, that it never! Be more like summat on the pictures or in a book, like. Don't you worrit yourself about that old 'Oard. If there ever was such a thing, I reckon it was found out and spent many a long year afore this."

"I suppose so, yes." They walked on in silence again. Then Laura asked, "Did you know Bonamy Dysey, the son who died?"

"Ar. I reckon it was on'y put about as he died, though."

“Why?”

“Arst me, that did ought to ’ave wented be’ind bars, and then was shipped abroad, the way ’e wouldn’t bring no more disgrace on the family.”

“I heard he went abroad, but...”

“He never went abroad not near so soon as Mrs. Dysey like to make out. That be *my* opinion, any road. And I *don’t* come to reckon as he be dead, neether.”

“Have you anything to go on?”

But the gardener wagged his head and drew her attention to a robin which showed signs of accompanying them on their way.

“Tamest liddle old birds in the whole wide world,” he said approvingly. “Christian birds, they liddle robins be.”

Laura perceived that both topics of conversation she had introduced would have to be shelved, if only for a time. However, the second of them had given her food for thought. She recounted the gardener’s remarks to Dame Beatrice.

“This widely-held opinion that Bonamy is still alive,” she said, “makes nonsense of the theory that somebody has knocked off Tom and Eustace so as to inherit the property. The only person, other than Bonamy, who seems to be in line for the inheritance is Cyril. If Cyril believes that Bonamy is dead, well, that’s that, and he remains chief suspect. But some of this stuff flying about that Bonamy is still alive must surely have reached Cyril, so, unless he’s reaching for his little meat-axe against the time Bonamy comes home and stakes his claim, well, I’d be inclined to say ‘Pass, Cyril. All’s well.’”

“I see your point.”

“There remains Henry, of course. I can’t see why on earth he should want to murder Eustace (unless Eustace had the goods on him for killing Tom—yes, that must be it!)

but it seems to me he had a double motive for murdering his father. After all, Tom *had* turned him out of the house and, although a by-blow, he *was* Tom's son."

"He may not remember the one or be aware of the other, you know."

"That's true enough, of course. All the same, he's not at all sure whether Cyril is his father or his uncle. How are you going to start the ball rolling?"

"By sending George over to the chalet with a note."

"He'll hate walking all that way. Besides, how is he to get across the river?"

"He will not have so very far to walk. I presume that tradesmen call at the chalet. There must be a road to it, and on the same side of the river."

The note was despatched, and George, who had been told to wait for an answer, returned at the end of an hour and ten minutes with the news that Henry Dysey had gone off to the races and was not expected back until the late evening, but that Cyril would come to the castle immediately after lunch. He arrived at a quarter to three to find Dame Beatrice at the receipt of custom in the gatehouse entry, and that there was an empty chair beside the one she was occupying. Laura was showing a party of Wednesday visitors over the house. The police had lifted their embargo, and sightseers were flocking in to look with ghoulish reverence at a place stricken twice within three years by violent death.

"I assume," he said, taking the seat she offered him, and placing his hat and walking-stick on the table which held the pudding-basin and Gavin's last consignment of sketches, "that there is a reason for your having asked me to come over."

"A good reason, I think," Dame Beatrice replied. "I have been reading, not without difficulty, the journal of one Christopher Dysey, who appears to have been resident in the castle in the mid-eighteenth century."

"Old Kit? Oh, yes, he is said to walk."

"Interesting. He mentions something which he calls the Ravens' Hoard."

"They say he is always trying to contact somebody to whom he can explain where the treasure is hidden."

"There is, or was, such a treasure, then?"

"There doesn't seem any doubt about that, but my belief is that it was either stolen or dissipated years ago. Tom and Eustace and I used to spend hours, as boys, looking for it, but we had no luck, needless to say. Did you bring me over here just to talk about it?"

"Not altogether. I wondered whether perhaps that is what your brother Eustace was looking for when he met his death."

"It's quite likely. Eustace was always the romantic one of the family. But even if he *was* snooping around, it doesn't bring us any nearer to finding out who killed him, and what the reason was, does it?"

"No, it does not. What I really want from you, if you will be good enough, is a detailed description of the evening you spent here before your brother Thomas died."

"Oh, you think the deaths of Thomas and Eustace were connected, do you?"

"What else is there to think?"

"Coincidences do happen. Anyway—I don't mean to be offensive, mind you—what business is it of yours?"

"Two unexplained deaths on premises of which I am temporarily the tenant may be held to make it my business to enquire into the circumstances of those deaths, it seems to me."

"Oh, well, if you think so, although I should have thought the police would have all that sort of thing in hand. Well, what do you want me to tell you?"

"First, whether there was any particular reason why Mr. Henry Dysey was not invited to the dinner-party."



"He *was* invited. He turned down the invitation, that's all."

"Why did he do that, I wonder?"

"He couldn't stand Etta, he had it in for Tom, and he found out that those silly girls Gina and Peggy Wick had been asked to come."

"You say 'he had it in for Tom.' Was there any good reason for that?"

"He discovered—how, I don't know, for I certainly never told him—that Tom had kicked him out when he was three years old. I suppose Etta gave him the information. She's spiteful enough."

"I have heard something of this. At the age of three he became your adopted son."

"Nothing legal, you understand."

"How long ago was it that Henry decided you were not his father? Since when has he taken to referring to you as his uncle?"

"Oh, since he was about twelve, I think."

"As long ago as that?"

"Oh, yes, quite as long ago as that."

"And if it *was* Mrs. Dysey who gave him this information, which of them was it she intended to upset—Henry or your brother Thomas?"

"Heaven knows! You never know what Etta's intentions are, except to create mischief. She's the most god-forsaken woman I know. Actuated by nothing but malice—that's Etta."

"Did Henry and her son Bonamy have much to do with one another after you and Henry left the castle and went to live in the chalet?"

"We didn't go to live in the chalet straight away, you know. We lodged at the home farm until Henry was twenty-two. If Henry had to do with any other boy, except the boys at school and college, it was with young Jerry Carter. He was

never invited to the castle until after Bonamy got into trouble and had to be shipped abroad out of harm's way."

"Oh, yes?"

"Embezzlement."

"Dear me!"

"Tom paid up before proceedings could be taken. Beggared himself, I've no doubt. Bonamy had got away with a few thousands, I believe. It was then Tom sold me the land and I built the chalet."

"And where is Bonamy Dysey now?"

"Under six feet of tropical soil, I hope."

"Oh, I see. Why, then, does Mrs. Dysey let the castle and go to France for three months every year?"

Cyril Dysey got up, retrieved his hat and stick, stuck the one on his head and thumped the ferrule of the other hard down on to the paved courtyard, as he said,

"How should I know? Needs the rent, I suppose. And how do you know she goes to France? Much more likely to go and tuck herself away in some seedy little boarding-house in the south of England. And now, if you'll excuse me, I have business to attend to."

"You haven't told me anything about the dinner-party," Dame Beatrice pointed out.

"Find out for yourself! I've nothing to say about that. It was a fiasco, that's all," said Cyril, in his most boorish tone.

"I had hoped you might be able to tell me something which might help Mr. Henry Dysey."

Cyril stared at her.

"Help Henry? What do you mean?"

"Well, he seems to be the only person with the faintest shadow of a motive for killing Tom Dysey, does he not?"

The veins in Cyril's neck began to swell. He looked as though he was about to speak, but after opening and closing his mouth once or twice, he gave a vicious snort, smashed the ferrule of his stick on to the paving again and then, pushing his hat to one side of his head, he tramped

away. Dame Beatrice gazed benignly after him until she lost sight of him over the crest of the hill.

"Well! What was that in aid of?" asked Laura, who had dismissed the visitors to look at the fortifications for themselves, and so had witnessed Cyril Dysey's angry departure. "You seem to have upset him a bit, don't you?"

"True," replied Dame Beatrice. "He departed in haste, but I venture to think that he will return at leisure, when he has had time to reconsider his attitude."

"What *can* you have said to him?"

"Nothing that he has not thought of for himself. Besides, I have as good as accused Henry of murdering Thomas."

"Pitching it strong, what? And I thought you didn't believe it, anyway."

"Whether I believe it or not, there is no doubt about what Mr. Cyril thinks. Besides, until the very end of our conversation, he was so unlike himself that I could not help wondering what he was hiding."

"Unlike himself?"

"Yes, indeed. He was smooth, polite, co-operative and, I think, untruthful. He avers, for example, that he and Henry lodged with the Carters at the home farm until Henry was grown-up. At about that time Bonamy got into this trouble (here he reverted to the truth, I think) and was sent out of the country after his father had settled his debts. Cyril, coming to the rescue financially, purchased from Thomas the land on which the chalet is erected—at least, that is what he says."

"What do you think *did* happen, then?"

"I think they may have lodged at the home of the present Mrs. Cyril."

"Did he tell you anything about the dinner-party?"

"No."

"Well, I don't suppose there's anything more to tell."

"Time will show that. I descry more visitors. What a pity Hamish is not here! His enthusiasm and his services were

invaluable on these tiresome occasions. I wish we could find out whether Henry or Bonamy is the older."

"Ask the oldest inhabitant," said Laura.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### And Returns at Leisure

“Saies, ‘God you save, my deere madam,’  
Saies, ‘God you save and see!’—  
Said, ‘You be welcome, Kyng Estmere,  
Right welcome unto mee.’”

*King Estmere*

Cyril Dysey returned to the castle two days later. He came at once to the point of his visit.

“You asked me about that dinner, the night that Tom died,” he said. Dame Beatrice, who had been busy with the castle archives, put away the book which she had been studying and greeted him in matter-of-fact tones.

“So here you are,” she said. “Yes, I should like to have your account of what happened that night. So far, I have had descriptions of it from the vicar, the doctor, their wives, and Miss Gina Wick. I doubt whether there is much more for me to learn about the dinner-party itself, but there are one or two questions I should like to put to you. Do, please, sit down.”

“Fire away,” grunted Cyril, seating himself.

“Thank you. First, then, can you tell me at what hour you left the castle that night? I understand from the doctor and the vicar that their visit terminated at about a quarter to ten. When did *you* go home?”

“When did *I* go home? Well, I didn’t, you know. Stayed the night. Was on the spot when that fool Bellairs found

Tom's body."

"I see. So you cannot give Mr. Henry an alibi for the hours immediately preceding midnight."

"What's he want with an alibi? Look here, I'm sorry I flew off the handle the last time I came, but what are you getting at about Henry?"

"I am attempting to clear away some dead wood."

"I don't understand you. Henry wouldn't hurt a fly."

"As a small child, he seems to have contrived to hurt his half-brother Bonamy more than a little. Doctor Binns says that he treated the child Bonamy's injuries."

"Well, so he did, but they weren't caused by Henry."

"Doctor Binns seemed to doubt that, too."

"Well, of course! Binns, fool though he is, knows the difference between injuries inflicted by one small boy on another and injuries handed out to a child by an adult."

"You astound me!"

"Besides, Bonamy was three years older than Henry. A child of three can't overcome a much bigger and heavier child of six. I won't have Henry accused of something he didn't do! It was a good thing for Henry when I took him away from here. Tom was always pitching into the child, although nothing to compare with Bonamy's injuries."

"At least, then, Mr. Thomas had no favourites, if what you tell me is true."

"Oh, it wasn't Tom who knocked Bonamy about. But that's ancient history. What I really came for was to ask you whether Etta specifically accuses Henry of these murders."

"She has not accused him to me."

"Why should he be suspected, anyway?"

"Before I reply to that question—although I think you know the answer just as well as I do—allow me to ask you another. You are now, I take it, the heir to the castle and the estates."

"As I've told you before, I don't want either."

"Are they willed to you?"

"No, they are not, if you want to know. Tom willed them to Bonamy."

"Then Bonamy *is* still alive?"

"Why else do you suppose Etta goes bouncing over to France every summer?"

"You seem to have reconsidered some previous opinions. Does Mr. Henry know that his half-brother is the heir?"

"Goodness knows! We've never mentioned it, so far as I remember. Henry will have whatever I leave. He wouldn't expect anything more."

"If Bonamy is alive, why did Mrs. Dysey have a memorial tablet put up to him in the church?"

"Guess for yourself. Fool women do damn-fool things."

"You told me that Bonamy was sent abroad by his parents because he was involved in some scandal."

"Embezzled his firm's money, the young ass."

"I also understand that the loss was made good before police action was involved."

"Right again. But Tom beggared himself and Etta, and never forgave the little forger. Kicked him out and told him never to come back."

"But made him his heir, all the same. Tell me, now that his father is dead, does not his mother wish to have him with her?"

"Well, she didn't, but now, I'm inclined to think, that's all arranged. He's coming home as soon as the police have arrested Eustace's murderer."

"Why must his home-coming wait upon that?"

"Etta thinks that whoever did for Tom and Eustace may do for Bonamy, too."

"Considering that you claim to dislike her so much, you seem in rather close touch with her and her opinions. *Does* she suspect Mr. Henry of the murders?"

"No. She suspects *me*!" said Cyril Dysey, laughing for almost the first time since Dame Beatrice had known him.

"Oh, she's got it all cut and dried. She came over to the chalet a week ago, and told me all about it. She thinks, you see, that I intend Henry shall inherit, and that I'll go to any lengths to get every other possible claimant out of the way."

"But, if the estates are willed to Bonamy, then, even if Bonamy were killed, the property would not necessarily come to you, would it, unless Bonamy has willed it to you? I understand that it is not entailed."

"Oh, Etta wouldn't think as far as that. Women don't, you know, not on the whole. A lot of Mrs. Bennetts when it comes to the law, that's what women are."

"Present company excepted, I hope," said Laura, from an obscure corner of the room. Cyril chuckled.

"Do you remember inviting Laura, her husband, her son, and myself to lunch, soon after we came here?" asked Dame Beatrice. "The dinner-party was mentioned then, I believe, but I cannot recollect that you referred to Bonamy Dysey except obliquely. You also led me to understand that Mr. Henry was illegitimate, but that he was Mrs. Dysey's child."

"Ah, well, it doesn't do to give everything away to strangers, does it?"

"Did your elder brother make no provision at all for his natural son?"

"No. I took Henry over, lock, stock, and barrel, and it was understood that Tom renounced all rights in him. Anyway, with what it cost to cover up for young Bonamy, there wouldn't have been anything left for anybody else, you see."

"You also indicated that there were, in your expression, 'high jinks' at that dinner-party. Nobody else has mentioned anything of the sort—rather the reverse, in fact."

"Oh, well!" Cyril waved his hand. "I remember telling you who were there. You'd hardly believe *that* company could have a riotous time, would you?—not that those two girls wouldn't have managed it if they could, the hussies!"



"This morning you have stated that Mr. Bonamy Dysey is still alive, yet, at your chalet, you gave me to understand that this was doubtful, although you did not mention his name."

"Look here, madam, what are you getting at?"

"The truth about the deaths of Mr. Thomas and Mr. Eustace, I hope. What do you know about Mr. Henry's mother?"

"Damn-all. Tom met her, and got her with child. What about it? He's not the first man to run away from his obligations."

"That is certainly true. Did you ever meet Henrietta Slepe?"

"So that was her name, was it? Funny that Tom should have married another Henrietta! And Shakespeare thought there was nothing in a name!"

"He caused Juliet to think so. It is not the same thing."

"You're quibbling!"

"Not half as much as you did, on the occasion of that luncheon party you so kindly gave for us."

"Oh, well, we won't quarrel, then. You'll see Henry's all right, won't you?"

"He is on the list of suspects, as I told you."

"The police list?"

"I have no way of knowing that, at present."

"On your damned list, then?"

"On the list of everybody, I imagine, who believes that the murders were committed for gain."

"Of the Dysey estates? That's laughable!"

"Not if the Ravens' Hoard is still extant."

"You can forget the Ravens' Hoard. That went west long ago."

"He's much too anxious that we shall think so, anyway," remarked Laura, when Cyril, abruptly declining an invitation

to stay to lunch, had stumped off out of the house. "All the same, if it *is* still in existence, I expect you'd have to tear the house and castle apart before you'd find it."

"Let us pursue our researches," said Dame Beatrice, "and as I propose, in a metaphor I have heard you employ, to leave no stone unturned, I shall now devote my attention to the ancient cookery books which take up the whole of the next shelf."

"When are you going to talk to Henry Dysey?" asked Laura.

"I think Henry will decide that for himself. I have sown the wind by indicating to his uncle that I suspect Henry of being our murderer, so I expect to reap the whirlwind at any moment."

The whirlwind, when it came, blew itself out in the first five minutes. Henry turned up at half-past three in the afternoon just as Dame Beatrice was deciphering an extract from an eighteenth-century book on housekeeping which began with something crossed out by a later hand, and which then proceeded to impart to the reader that its purpose was "to inform such Housekeepers as are not in the Higher Rank of Fortune, how to Eat, or Entertain Company, in the most elegant Manner, at a reasonable Expence." Further researches into this mine of charitable lore were prevented by the arrival of Henry.

"Here, I say, you know," he began, "this business about my uncle, you know..."

"Sit down, Mr. Henry," said Dame Beatrice, returning the book to its place on the library shelf. "What business of your uncle, and which uncle, is under review?"

"Oh, don't stall!" said the young man, flinging himself about the room in an agitated manner, and then suddenly dropping into a chair. "You're going round telling people I murdered Uncle Eustace. Well, I didn't."

"I am not going round telling people anything," said Dame Beatrice mildly. "I did suggest to Mr. Cyril Dysey that you are under suspicion not only of killing Mr. Eustace, but Mr. Thomas, too."

"Yes, I know, and I'm about sick of it all. The police have grilled me until I don't know whether I did it or not, and now you!"

"If you did not do it, you have nothing to fear."

"That's a lot of boloney, and you know it. Why *should* I do it, anyway? I've nothing to gain by any of the family deaths."

"Oh, but you have," Dame Beatrice pointed out, in the same gentle tone and in the same very beautiful voice.

"Surely you must see that. With Mr. Thomas and Mr. Eustace both out of the way, and yourself Mr. Cyril's heir, you have a splendid chance, even if you don't murder Mr. Cyril, of inheriting the family fortunes."

"Of course I haven't. There's a son, a chap named Bonamy. Lives abroad, I believe, but I bet he'll come home fast enough when probate has been settled and he knows he's the heir."

"But I understood that Bonamy was dead. Did not his mother raise a memorial tablet to him in Ravens Dysey church?"

"She did. Have you looked at it?" His mild tones now matched her own.

"No."

"Well, I've learnt it off by heart. It reads: 'To the memory of Bonamy Dysey, who lies in Spanish Morocco, far from his home and his mother.' Does anything strike you about the wording? It's peculiar, to say the least, don't you think?"

"Two things strike me about it. One is that no mention is made of his father, and the other—but perhaps I show unseemly levity in suggesting this..."

"Oh, no, you don't," put in Henry. He grinned, not very pleasantly. "Do go on."

"Well, is not the wording somewhat reminiscent of the time-honoured jest that an ambassador is a man who lies abroad for the good of his country?"

"Well, that's how it strikes me, I admit. Anyhow, if Bonamy is still alive, he is still the Dysey heir, and poor bastard Edmund doesn't get a look in, and never expected to."

"You are certain, then, that the legitimate Edgar was not disinherited?"

"I am quite certain. I've seen a copy of the will."

"I wonder that the vicar did not question the wording of the memorial. It is, to say the least, a little unusual."

"Oh. Banks was a gaga old doddler, you know. He was over ninety at the time, and died soon afterwards. Then we had a chap named Coomber, but he was made headmaster of a public school about three years ago, so now we've got this fellow who had the living given to him."

"I am convinced, then, that, since you believe Bonamy Dysey to be alive, you could have had no motive for disposing of his father and your uncle in order to clear the way to the inheritance for Mr. Cyril and yourself, unless, of course, you propose to murder Bonamy also when he arrives to claim the estates."

Henry laughed.

"I haven't yet got that far in my plans," he said.

"There is a curious discrepancy in the evidence at my disposal," said Dame Beatrice, after a pause. "If the memorial tablet was conceived in spiteful mood by Mrs. Dysey, why does she visit her son every summer while the castle is let?"

"She's only let the castle since her husband's death, you know. It was never let during his life-time, so far as I know. As for her visits to Bonamy, well, I suppose she's forgiven him."

"What about this clause in my lease that I must admit the public on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons?"

"Oh, I believe that when Tom Dysey inherited it, it was in pretty poor shape, you know, and he got some historical society, or antiquarian gang, or someone, to patch it up. I expect they charged him only about a quarter of what the actual repairs cost, and, in return, he was to suffer this invasion twice a week during the summer and early autumn."

"I see. What did you do on the night of Mr. Thomas's death?"

"What I did *not* do," said Henry sharply, "is mess about with that wretched kid Peggy Wick, in spite of what her mother thinks and says."

"Cannot Peggy convince her of your innocence?"

"You're putting your tongue in your cheek when you ask me that. Peggy could clear me with her mother in three minutes if she'd only tell the truth, but she daren't."

"Really? Is not one persuasive male as bad or as good as another?"

"Not when he's a married man and a father!"

"Are you sure of what you say?"

"It's what Peggy told me when the row blew up. Of course, I could hardly bring Tom Dysey's name into it, and, anyway, by that time he was dead."

"But surely this incident did not take place on the night of the dinner-party?"

"No, of course it didn't, but Peggy swore it did, and that it happened with *me*. You see, it made an altogether better story. I knew Uncle Cyril was staying the night at the castle, therefore what more likely than that I should tip the wink to the two girls that the chalet would be ours, get in some drink and Jerry Carter, and make whoopee? That's Peggy's story, and she's stuck to it."

"Was any attempt made to get you to marry her?"

"No. She stuck her feet in and said she wouldn't marry me if I were the last man, etc. etc. I think she was afraid of

the dog's life I'd lead her if we *had* been forced into marriage."

"But would you have allowed yourself to be forced into marriage with her?"

"Oh, yes, and put the screw on Tom Dysey ever afterwards, if he'd lived—which, of course, he didn't."

"You really believe you would have blackmailed him?"

"Why not? What is it the poet says about all alike must pay hereafter, some for sighs and some for laughter?"

"What you are telling me," said Dame Beatrice, "is that to have Tom Dysey alive would have been more to your advantage than to have killed him."

"You can check with Peggy, you know. Bounce her hard enough, and she's bound to come clean. After all, she struck lucky, and it's all over and done with now."

"So we acquit our chief suspect," said Laura, when Henry had gone. Dame Beatrice had motioned her to stay in the room when Henry had been shown in.

"I hardly call him our *chief* suspect," Dame Beatrice observed, "but he did not answer the question when I asked him, rather abruptly, what he had been doing on the night of Thomas Dysey's death."

"No. He only told you what he had *not* been doing. But, you know, isn't he a bit dim-witted not to see that the girl's story gives him a perfect alibi? It seems to me that he's only got to admit to the police that Peggy told the truth at the time, to put himself completely in the clear."

"But, of course, Peggy did *not* tell the truth, that is the trouble. I must have a word with Mr. Jerry Carter," said Dame Beatrice. "I wonder whether you will be good enough...? I do not think it would be advisable to send Zena or even the discreet and loyal Henri."

"It's good to have Henri and Celestine here. Makes it feel more like home. Yes, of course I'll go over to the farm."

What do you want me to say?"

"Just ask when it will be convenient for young Mr. Carter to call upon me."

"Won't it sound a bit odd?"

"All the better. Curiosity is a great spur."

So Laura set off for the home farm and gave the message. Jerry Carter was not in, so, having delivered herself of her errand, she drank a cup of strong tea with his wife and his mother, ate homemade cheese straws, and admired the baby. As she was about to leave, an apparition swathed in shawls made for the tray of tea.

"You might have told me there was company, and you'd wetted the tea," it said. This was Laura's introduction to old Mrs. Carter, contemporary and sister of the father of Thomas, Eustace, and Cyril Dysey. This (thought Laura, recalling a joking piece of advice she had given Dame Beatrice) was the Oldest Inhabitant.

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed the next oldest Mrs. Carter, John Carter's wife and Jerry Carter's mother. "You really shouldn't risk they stairs on your own, really you shouldn't! Might fall and break your leg!"

"And who'd be the worse off for that?" demanded the old lady, seating herself. "You keep me put away in that miserable bedroom as if I was a Turk's wife, so what's it matter whether my legs are broken or whole? Who's this?"

"This is Mrs. Gavin, mother. She's one of the ladies who's taken over the castle for a bit."

"So's Etta can go and live with her fancy fellow, I suppose! Disgraceful! As if the baby wasn't enough of a disgrace already! And calling him Henry, as though there was nothing to be ashamed of! Glorifying in her sin, I call it! I wonder Tom puts up with it, really I do!"

"Tom's dead, dear. Don't you remember?"

"Dead, is he? None of that lot were ever any good! Remind me of the Kilkenny cats, they do! All but Eustace, and even he was a nasty, snooping little boy, always

ferreting round! Ferreting round and singing. Ah, singing and never even knowing! Enough to drive you silly!”

“Now that’s enough of that, mother. Here’s your cup of tea. Now you just drink it up, and then straight back upstairs. I’ll come with you and make your fire up and bring you a nice brown egg for your tea.”

“I don’t want eggs. I want a bloater.”

“We haven’t got a bloater, dear, and you know you can’t manage the bones.”

“Singing! Always singing, and didn’t even know! A dratted row, I call it! Enough to drive you silly!”

Laura returned to her employer with the tidings that Jerry Carter would be over as soon as he had had his tea and, in his mother’s expression, cleaned himself.

“Ah,” said Dame Beatrice. “Very satisfactory. He will be in need of beer. Tell Henri to have some in readiness. Meanwhile, let us pursue our researches into the Dysey archives.”

“You don’t *really* think the Ravens’ Hoard is still in existence? You’re not still barking up that riven old tree?”

Dame Beatrice did not reply to this enquiry. Instead she said,

“I wonder what the distaff side has to tell us? A man may not tell his secrets to his mother, but it is not unknown for him to confide in his wife.”

“Remind me to tell you about Grandmother Carter,” said Laura.

Jerry Carter arrived at seven, freshly shaven and in his best clothes.

“You wanted to see me, mam? No complaints about the milk and the eggs, I hope?”

“Nothing of that sort. In fact, I have no complaints of any kind, Mr. Carter,” responded Dame Beatrice. “What I



want to ask of you is a little help in clearing up a matter of some present obscurity."

"Oh, ah?" said Jerry, looking, Laura afterwards observed, a good deal wiser than, probably, he was.

"Can you cast your mind back to the night on which Mr. Thomas died?"

"Don't know as I can do that. What did you want to know?"

"Whether you can remember whether Mr. Henry Dysey spent the evening with you at the farmhouse."

"To my knowledge, Henry Dysey never spent an evening over at our place in his life. He thinks himself other than us."

"I see. Then who *did* go to the farmhouse that evening?"

"I reckon you're trying to lead me somewhere, but I'm blest if I can see what you're getting at, mam."

"Well, if I may be direct to the point of offensiveness, at what time did you escort Miss Gina and Miss Peggy Wick back to the castle that night?"

"And who might they be?" His face was wooden.

"Look, Mr. Carter," said Dame Beatrice impressively, "cases of wilful murder are under consideration. Will you do nothing to help find the murderer of your relatives?"

"Uncle Tom and Uncle Eustace, you mean? Look, us have had police, the newspapers, the burglars..."

"The burglars?"

"Ah, so us have."

"But when was this? Recently, do you mean? And what did they take away?"

"It was in the dead of the night about a fortnight ago. I can't call to mind which day of the week that would have been. Wait a minute, though! It wasn't a Sunday—I'd have remembered if it had been a Sunday, on account of what was taken away."

"The day of the week is probably of no importance, but tell me what was stolen."

"You couldn't exactly call it stolen, neither," said young Carter. "It was returned in less than a week. Ah, chucked over into one of the sties, that was. My mother was properly put out about that. It was the Family Bible, you see."

"And that was the only thing which was taken from the house?"

"The only and one thing, mam. What do you make of that, now?"

"And you have no suspicions as to the identity of your strange burglar?"

"None at all. There was money in the house—ah, that's it! It must a-been a Wednesday night, because my dad and me had been to market and the banks was shut before we could put in our takings, so we brought home a matter of two hundred pounds, I dare say, on account of some calves and young porkers and one of Dawnligh's colts as we sold. But there wasn't a penny piece gone, although there must have been them as knew we hadn't been to the bank, nor none of my grandmother's silver went—nothing!"

"Your grandmother having been...?"

"Alicia Dysey, sister of Uncle Thomas's father, her that married my grandfather, Gerald Carter, against the family's wishes. My father was their son, and that's how I come to be connected with the Dyseys. Grandfather Dysey, Mr. Thomas's dad, gave us the farm. He wasn't going to see his sister the wife of a cowman, he said, and the farm been ours ever since."

"Very interesting. And you still remember nothing that you did on the night of Mr. Thomas Dysey's death?"

"Can't say I do, mam. All I know is that Henry never came to the farm, not ever in his life he didn't."

“Which seems to dispose of Mr. Cyril’s assertion that he and Henry lodged at the farm from the time they left the castle until, many years later, they moved into the chalet,” said Dame Beatrice to Laura, when their visitor had gone.

“Why should he have said such a thing if it wasn’t true?”

“Perhaps because he does not wish us to know where they *did* lodge during those years.”

“You believe Jerry Carter, then?”

“He is almost the only member of the Dysey family and its collaterals that I *do* believe, child. What was it you were going to tell me about his grandmother?”

Laura described the appearance and conversation of Grandmother Carter.

“I wondered,” she said, at the end, “whether the old lady had got her ideas mixed up.”

“I hope not,” said Dame Beatrice. “If she is right, that which I have long suspected will prove to be the truth.”

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### E. and O. E.

“About the middle o’ the night,  
The cocks began to crow,  
And at the dead hour o’ the night,  
The corpse began to thraw<sup>\*</sup>—.”

*Young Benjie*

“Well, if you don’t think Jerry Carter was lying, what about Gina Wick?” said Laura. “And what do you mean about Grandmother Carter? I can’t really think she’s got hold of the right end of the stick. Why, that would mean...”

“Yes, it would.”

“Food for much deep thought, in fact.”

“Of course, there are other, far more important things, which we have not been told.”

“Such as?”

“Such as which of the family and its connections knew of the existence of the priest’s hole; such as the real identity of Cyril Dysey’s housekeeper-wife; such as who (granted that he or she knew of its existence) would have used the priest’s hole as a repository for Eustace’s body.”

“You mean a certain amount of brawn and muscle would have been necessary to shift the body that far?”

“And all this without disturbing...”

“A light sleeper such as you, and a non-sleeper such as me? Yes, indeed, as the Welsh poacher said when asked how

the rabbit got into the stew. You've said that there are three suspects. I should have thought possibly more."

"Oh, well, three is a nebulous, legendary, apocalyptic, amorphous, magical number. One thinks of the Three Graces, the Three Golden Apples, the Shadowy Third, the Three Norns, the Rule of Three, the triumvirs, the three witches, the Third Man, the best out of three, the three legs of the Isle of Man..."

"Likewise, two's company, three's none, not to mention being three sheets in the wind," said Laura, grinning. "But what do I see? No Thisbe do I see, but, instead, the local police force. Have they come to make an arrest, do you suppose?"

"The police, Madame," said Celestine, announcing the inspector distastefully.

"It's this way, mam," said the inspector. "We're up a gum tree, so to speak. We've narrowed it down, but not far enough to risk making an arrest. Now, Mrs. Gavin's husband"—he sketched a nod, which might be interpreted as a bow, towards Laura—"gave us a hint that if we found ourselves with what he called a psychological problem..."

"Of course," said Dame Beatrice, taking a small notebook from her skirt pocket.

"Well, mam, it's this way. I've divided up the suspects according to what you might call possible culpability, but..."

"None of it makes sense," said Laura. The inspector looked at her sadly.

"It all makes *sense*," he stated. "The thing is that it don't add up right."

"The same is often true of life in general," said Dame Beatrice. "You have divided up the suspects? And what follows?"

"That's what I'd be glad if you'd tell me, mam."

"Who are your suspects?"

"Getting on for the whole lot of them," said the inspector, taking out his notebook. "I don't really see how to

eliminate any of 'em, on their present showing. Who did *you* make out as the likeliest?"

"It depends largely on motive, don't you think?"

"That's where, for the moment, I'm beat. If we knew the motive, we'd be able to put a finger on the man."

"Or woman, of course."

The inspector looked at her.

"So that's the way *your* cat jumps," he said. "Bit of a heavy job for a woman, though, I should have thought."

"The person who did the killing is not necessarily the person who helped to move the bodies, Inspector."

"Oh, you think there was an accomplice?"

"I should think it is almost certain."

"Well, we wondered that ourselves, but, if so, that would point definitely in one direction, wouldn't it?"

"You mean it would point towards Mr. Henry and Mr. Cyril Dysey? It would certainly appear, on the face of it, as though they were the most likely to be in collusion over the matter. But let us see where we stand. My suspects, from the time of the discovery of Mr. Eustace's body have, of course, included them, but there are other possibilities. There seem to be wheels within wheels, not to mention what Mrs. Gavin would term..."

"Niggers in woodpiles," said Laura.

"As how, ladies? It seems to me that Mr. Cyril and Mr. Henry had the most to gain by these deaths. Barring Mr. Thomas and Mr. Eustace, there's no doubt Mr. Cyril stands to inherit the property, and, him and Mr. Henry being like father and son, Mr. Henry would likely expect to be next on the list, I should say."

"Neither would have any great expectations while Mr. Bonamy was alive."

"Mr. Bonamy? But he's been dead these many years, mam. There's a memorial to him in the church."

"It does not claim to commemorate his death, Inspector. I did not realise this, I must admit, until it was pointed out to

me.”

“But if Mr. Bonamy is alive, then the will still stands!”

“Ah, you have seen Mr. Thomas’s will?”

“Why, yes, we checked on that at Somerset House, as a matter of routine, but, in view of the memorial tablet, we wrote it off as a dead letter.”

“The bequests, I take it, do not stop short at Mr. Bonamy.”

“His lawful issue is mentioned.”

“Ah! So, whether he is alive or dead, he may have lawful issue. Is it known whether he was married before he left his home?”

“He was not, mam. We checked that, too. Although, if he’d married later, his issue wouldn’t hardly be old enough to murder a couple of grown men.”

“One would take that for granted, I think.”

“But what makes you suppose Mr. Bonamy may be alive, mam?”

“As I suggested, the wording of the memorial tablet is ambiguous. Besides that, there might be some point in finding out where Mrs. Dysey went and whom she visited while I was renting the castle during this August and part of September.”

“You think she went to see Mr. Bonamy?”

“I do not know, but I have received a hint, and I think the matter might repay investigation. Then, of course, it might be worth your while to probe into the recent activities of the woman who calls herself Henrietta Dysey and who is rumoured to be Mr. Henry’s mother.”

“First I’ve heard of this, but, of course, I’ve only been here five years. Does that mean Mr. Henry is Mr. Cyril’s son, and not his nephew?—or is he the son of one of the other two Dyseys? With a fly-by-night, revenge could be the motive, and not the inheritance at all.”

“It could be both, could it not?”

“That’s right enough. It could, at that.”

"There are other factors to be taken into account. Not every one of the possible suspects could have known of the existence of the priest's hole. Even if its existence was known, its situation and the means of access to it need not have been."

"Perhaps you'd be good enough to explain that, mam."

"Well, let us take the people concerned."

"Unless there *is* a nigger in the woodpile," said Laura, "it's always possible, in a complicated business of this kind, that there's X, an unknown factor."

"I know. We must certainly bear that in mind," said her employer. "Well, now, Inspector, let us agree—as I can see we do—that there is a strong case against Cyril and Henry Dysey. Cyril, who was born and brought up here in the castle, must have known of the priest's hole. Whether he knew how to get into it is another matter, but we will assume that he did. Henry seems to have left the castle when he was three years old, but..."

"There was nothing to stop Mr. Cyril telling him all about it, mam?"

"Something to talk about during the long winter evenings," said Laura. "I'll tell you what, though," she added. "There's one person who *must* know all about the priest's hole and how to get into it, and that's Mrs. Dysey."

"How do you make that out, Mrs. Gavin?" asked the inspector.

"Because it—that window embrasure—was always roped off, so that the Wednesday and Saturday visitors couldn't stray into it and open the panelling by accident."

"On the other hand," said the inspector, "if she knew of this, surely she would have said something to you about it—warned you that it was roped off because that part of the flooring was dangerous, or given some reason of that kind, would she not?"

"Oh, yes, that's true," admitted Laura. "On the other hand, the castle was never let during Tom Dysey's life-time,



so..."

"Ah, but the Wednesday and Saturday visitors were admitted during his life-time, mam. I think there is some reason to doubt whether Mrs. Dysey *did* know how to open the panelling. On the other hand, of course, she *may* have known the secret."

"I see. A verdict of Not-Proven, which, in my own land, always seems to me to amount to a suggestion, if no more, that the accused is guilty all right, but has got away with it. But, of course, I may be wrong about that."

"Suppose Mrs. Dysey *had* known how to open up the priest's hole, how about her weight?" asked the inspector.

"She is a spare woman, but has large bones," said Dame Beatrice. "I should suppose her to be quite as heavy as Laura here."

"That could be proved, I suppose, if she'd agree to make the trial, mam. If she refused, well, maybe we'd know what to think."

"And if she agreed, and the trap-door worked, it wouldn't prove anything," argued Laura. "For one thing—as I've found out for myself—you can't go it alone. You can be the person who stands on the trap-door to open it, or you can be the one to nip inside when it's open, but you can't be both. And the reason for that is that, once inside, you're immured. There doesn't seem to be any way of opening up again, and, if you go out the other way, you're also stymied, because you can't get out of the castle undercroft. In any case, if you showed her weight could open the trap, it wouldn't prove she'd ever stood on the spot before. All the same, I think Tom Dysey is certain to have told her about it. You couldn't spend all your married life making a kind of Bluebeard's Chamber of that part of the dining-room. If you pleaded that the floor was unsafe, it seems to me that the party of the second part would soon be asking why on earth, if that was so, you didn't have something done about it."

"I think Mrs. Gavin has a point there, mam," said the inspector.

"Yes, I think she has," agreed Dame Beatrice, "and she may well be right, but I still think that had Mrs. Dysey known of the whereabouts of the trap-door she would have given us some reason for not crossing the rope barrier."

"She may have thought that only Hamish would do that," suggested Laura, "and she'd know he isn't nearly heavy enough to work the doings. It's amazing how English people such as ourselves, to name but one well-behaved section of the populace, *do* respect roped-off spaces and *Keep off the Grass* notices, and *No Admission Except on Business*, and *No Parking*, and so on and so forth.'

The inspector nodded. Dame Beatrice proceeded with her suggestions.

"Then," she said, "if we agree that Mr. Thomas knew the secret, we are entitled to assume that Mr. Eustace knew it, too, as well as Mr. Cyril."

"Yes, there's not much doubt it was Eustace's hidey-hole," said Laura.

"Exactly."

"And one person who knew that Eustace was around and about the castle was Henry," Laura continued.

"And another was Mrs. Dysey," said Dame Beatrice. "There cannot be much doubt about that. At the bottom of our list of suspects come Henrietta Dysey (so-called), the Carter family and, of course, Bonamy, if he is still alive."

"There's a big objection to Bonamy, mam, if he is, as you say, still alive. He might have killed his father, but, if he did, it's odd he's never turned up to claim his inheritance."

"There seems to be a theory that his mother has persuaded him to put off his return until such time as you have arrested the murderer. She may be afraid that Mr. Bonamy's own life is in danger so long as the killer is at large."

"Oh, I see. Well, that looks as though she suspects Mr. Cyril or Mr. Henry—more likely both of them."

"Yes, indeed. If one thing seems more probable than another about these deaths, it is that at least two persons were concerned in them."

"What I don't understand," said Laura, "is why, supposing Bonamy has turned up incognito—which I suppose he could have done after all this time—he found it necessary to kill his Uncle Eustace. I suppose he didn't know the terms of his father's will, and took it for granted that, because he'd blotted his copybook, he'd get nothing unless he blotted out all other possible claimants. In that case, hadn't Cyril better look out for himself? After all, he is Eustace's twin."

"If his mother was his collaborator, she would have told him, surely, that he had not been disinherited," said Dame Beatrice. "Therefore it would follow, either that Mrs. Dysey is not implicated and that there is another partner for Bonamy, or else that neither mother nor son is guilty."

"Well, all right, then," Laura conceded, "but what about this idea that Henrietta Slepe is a suspect? I can see she might have made up her mind to decimate the Dyseys in the hope that, in the end, Henry (if he *is* her son) might inherit, but I can't see how she could possibly have known about the priest's hole."

"Unless, with a lover's rashness, Thomas told her at some time or another," said Dame Beatrice. "A young man has an urge to make himself and his circumstances romantic and interesting at such a time. You must bear in mind, however, that there are other possibilities. Henry may have other parents, not these."

"I'll get on the track of this Henrietta," said the inspector, making a note. "A wronged woman is always apt to do funny things, mam. I'd like to find out where this misalliance took place and where Mr. Henry was born, and all the rest of it."

"In addition, of course," said Dame Beatrice, "there is always a suspicion that Henrietta was the person whom Mr. Thomas was asked to meet on the night of his death."

"Unlikely they'd have kept in touch all that time," objected Laura.

"I don't know so much about that, Mrs. Gavin," said the inspector. "Discarded ladies do tend to interest themselves in the progress of the men who've let 'em down. You'd be surprised. There's always the possibility of blackmail, you see, if the gentleman seems to have made a happy marriage. If Dame Beatrice is right, and this Henrietta *was* the one Mr. Thomas met on the night of his death, then you can be pretty certain that something of the sort was in her mind."

"That may very well be so," said Laura spiritedly, "but, in that case, surely the boot would be on the other foot?"

"I don't think I take your meaning, Mrs. Gavin," said the inspector cautiously.

"I should have thought it was pretty plain. In circumstances such as the above, it's the blackmailer who gets bumped off, not the victim."

"There might have been some sort of toss-up, ending in a fight," argued the inspector; but he spoke doubtfully.

"Anyway, we'll certainly get after the good lady and find out what she can tell us. But you mentioned the Carters, mam," he went on, turning to Dame Beatrice. "I can't see what *they* have to do with it. They only keep the farm. They're a most quiet, respectable family."

"Yes, but Jerry Carter, who now has a baby son, is descended from one of the Dyseys," said Laura. "I don't believe for a single instant that they're mixed up in anything wrong, but they might be able to throw a little light, don't you think?"

The inspector agreed, still doubtfully, that it might be so, and added that at least there seemed plenty to go on.

“And, of course,” he added, “if there was an accomplice—which brings us right back to Mr. Cyril and Mr. Henry—it doesn’t matter about figuring out which person, besides having the know-how of the priest’s hole, also had the strength to get Mr. Eustace’s body into it. If there *wasn’t* an accomplice, then the point remains.”

“There is just one other person who should be mentioned,” said Laura, “in my opinion, that is.”

“And who might that be, Mrs. Gavin?”

“Why, Cyril’s wife, this mysterious housekeeper person he seems to have married.”

“We checked Mr. Cyril’s marriage. It was all fair, square, and above board. She’s a distant relation of the Carters and she *did* used to be Mr. Cyril’s housekeeper until, seemingly, he decided it would be cheaper to have her as his wife.”

“But if she’s related to the Carters, she’s a Dysey,” said Laura triumphantly. The inspector smiled kindly upon her.

“I’ll have a go at the poor woman,” he said. “I suppose”—his tone altered—“I suppose this Henrietta *is* Mr. Henry’s mother? It couldn’t be that this Mrs. Cyril is the one?”

“That could mean that Cyril *is* his father, and not his uncle. I told you there was a nigger in the woodpile,” said Laura, smiling kindly in her turn.

“One more thing before you go, Inspector,” said Dame Beatrice. “I think your people should make certain that the vicarage at Ravens Dysey is kept under surveillance.”

“You don’t suspect the vicar, mam, surely?”

“No, no. I do suspect, however, that an attempt may be made on his life. The next time the living becomes vacant, it will be sold by the Dysey family and, I am told, for an enviable sum. The Dysey family (unless or until the fabulous Ravens’ Hoard comes to light) is an extremely poor one. I am sure you would wish the vicar to come to no harm.”

“It sounds a bit far-fetched to me, mam, but we’ll keep a weather-eye lifting.”

“There are others who are unlikely to be murderers, but who may know of the existence of the priest’s hole, Inspector. Laura has mentioned the Carters, to whom the secret may have been handed down. Another possibility is that the gardener here, Bellairs, may have heard of it.”

“Bellairs,” said the inspector, thoughtfully.

“Bellairs! Good Lord, that seems to ring a bell!” exclaimed Laura. “Although what bell,” she added soberly, “doesn’t seem to identify itself at the moment.”

---

\*-throw = writhe.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### News of the Heir Apparent

“‘From whence cam’ ye, young man?’ she said;  
‘That does surprise me sair;  
My door was bolted right secure,  
What way hae ye come here?—’  
‘O haud your tongue, ye lady fair,  
Lat a’ your folly be;  
Mind ye not o’ your turtle-doo  
Ye wiled from aff the tree?’”

*Earl Mar’s Daughter*

“You want to speak to my housekeeper? Help yourself, madam. She’s in the kitchen. Don’t forget, though, while you’re at it, that a wife’s not obliged to incriminate her husband,” said Cyril Dysey.

“I will bear it in mind,” said Dame Beatrice. “It will be almost my last chance to talk to her. My lease of Castle Dysey is nearly up.”

“You won’t be sorry, I take it, and neither shall I. Nothing but trouble since that water-nymph of yours came striding over my property demanding where she could swim. Something told me we should get no peace after that!”

“Laura is not usually regarded as a bird of ill-omen. Furthermore, I would remind you, Mr. Dysey, that the peace of your house was destroyed many years before Laura entered your life. Tell me—a good deal depends on your answer—who *is* Mr. Henry?”

"If I said he was my son, you'd not believe me."

"Then there is no point in your saying so, is there?"

"Look," said Cyril Dysey, "I won't make a secret of it. The police have been here again, and there's not much doubt about what they think."

"I know. They have yet to collect some concrete evidence, of course."

"Meaning you don't agree with them?"

"Meaning that I am keeping an open mind. You see, I have no concrete evidence to support *my* views, either. That is one reason why I should like a word with your wife. If I may ask an impudent, but not, I think, an impertinent question—why did you marry her?"

"Why does any man marry?"

"I could give you a dozen reasons."

"Go ahead, then."

"Because he believes he is in love, because the woman is wealthy, because she knows his shameful secret (whatever it is), because his father wishes it (the same applies to his mother, his brother, his sister, his wealthy uncle, or, of course, his rich aunt), because an error of judgment on his part has made the marriage desirable from the woman's point of view, because he believes marriage may advance him in his profession or vocation, because his relatives will suffer in some way (probably financially) if the marriage does not take place..."

"All right, all right! You win! That makes a dozen reasons if I allow you to count his sisters and his cousins and his aunts and so forth..."

"And," continued Dame Beatrice, "in order to render you a baker's count, because at some time his life, and, even in these more enlightened days, his liberty, may depend upon his being able, as you point out, to rely upon his wife's silence in the face of the law."

"All *right*, I say! Why on earth do women gab so? Anyway, I married for economic reasons. They say two can



live as cheaply as one, don't they? Well, they can't, if one has to pay the other four pounds a week and provide for her keep."

"I see. Why, then, did *she* marry *you*?"

"You'd better go on up to the house and ask her. *I've* nothing to hide!"

Dame Beatrice waited no longer. Cyril Dysey stared moodily after her as she walked towards the chalet and then returned to the punt in which he had ferried her over the water. Laura had suggested that she take George and the car, and go the longer way round to the chalet by road, but Dame Beatrice, who guessed that the police would have visited the chalet again, was interested to find out whether Cyril Dysey would welcome her visit. The fact that, when she hailed the chalet from the opposite bank of the river, Cyril had come across to her immediately, suggested that, in his uncouth, apparently unfriendly way, he was prepared at least to give the impression of being neighbourly, if not exactly civil.

She tapped at the kitchen door and went in. Mrs. Cyril Dysey, otherwise styled the housekeeper, was taking jam tarts from the oven. She did not look round when Dame Beatrice entered, but said, as though to the tarts,

"Well, it's to be hoped there's enough jam in 'em for you *this* time."

Dame Beatrice made no remark until the operation was concluded and the oven door closed. Then she said,

"I wonder whether you will be good enough to spare me a few minutes of your time?"

Mrs. Cyril stood up. Except for some short periods during the lunch to which the castle party had been invited, Dame Beatrice had seen nothing of her. She now found herself looking at a tall, thin, middle-aged woman whose dark hair was turning grey and who had a gaunt, intelligent face, weak brown eyes, and red, large hands. She wore a

print frock patterned in yellow on a white ground, and black and red slippers.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Cyril. "I'm sorry! I thought it was Mr. Henry come in from his fishing. Did you want anything, madam?"

"Only a word with you. May I sit down?"

"Walked all the way over from the castle, have you? I expect you'd like a cup of tea."

"Please do not trouble. My errand will take no more than a few minutes, I hope."

"If it's about the murders, I've told all I know to the police."

"Why should you assume that I have come about the murders?"

"Oh, I know all about you. Mr. Cyril and Mr. Henry don't talk over-much with me, but they talk to one another, and I've seen you here before, so I know who you are. And Percy Bellairs, your gardener, he's always on about you and the other folk up at the castle."

"Oh, you go to the home farm sometimes?"

"Always on Sunday afternoon and evening. I'm a bit related there, you see, and there isn't anywhere else for me to go."

"Oh, yes, somebody mentioned that you were related to the Carters."

"Distant, of course, only distant. Still, they don't mind having me, and it makes for somewhere to go. I suppose you won't be staying at the castle very much longer, madam."

"Not very much longer, I believe."

Mrs. Cyril, who had been standing at the kitchen table, seated herself in a worn leather-covered chair and said, with a shake of the head to give emphasis to her words,

"Not any longer much at all, if I might make bold."

"What causes you to think that?"

"Because that young Bonny be come home."

Dame Beatrice concealed her surprise. She said,  
"Mr. Bonamy Dysey, do you mean? But that need not concern me. The terms of my lease..."

"Don't you fret, he's come for his own. It wasn't *him* let you pay for a lease."

"Be that as it may, it is not the object of my visit today. I would like you to tell me what happened here on the night of Mr. Thomas Dysey's death. It may help to solve the problem of what happened, much more recently, to Mr. Eustace."

"What's it all to do with you?"

Dame Beatrice gave no indication that she had noticed the sudden change of tone. Indeed, she was no means displeased to have the woman come out from behind what she felt was a façade.

"I, too, have been visited by the police," she said, "and, as I was in occupation of the castle at the time of Mr. Eustace Dysey's death, you will appreciate that I have some interest in the matter."

"That's as maybe, but what odds is it what went on here when Mr. Tom died?"

"Possibly no odds at all, but there is a feeling, in some quarters, that Mr. Henry should have been invited to the dinner-party."

"Oh, there is, is there? Well, he may have been, or he may not. It's not for me to know which it was. All I know is he didn't go, and a good thing for him he didn't, else *he* might not be with us today, neither."

"Oh, you think that, do you?"

"I don't think anything, and I don't know anything."

"Are you Mr. Henry's mother?"

"As good as, I suppose you might say."

"That does not answer my question."

"And why *should* I answer your question? It's nothing to do with you whether I'm his mother or whether I'm not."

"Look, Mrs. Dysey..."

"There's no call to put that name on me."

"I understood that Mr. Cyril had done so."

"He's daft. He did it to—well, he did it. It was no wish of mine as he should."

"So you *are* Henry's mother?"

"I am not, neither. And Mr. Tom was not his father. Make what you can out of that!"

"Not so very long ago I encountered a woman who calls herself Henrietta Dysey. I imagine that she is his mother. I suppose also that she is your sister. You are much alike in appearance."

"What of it?" asked Mrs. Cyril. "Bonamy is expected home, so that's the end of that."

"Really? An end of it? Oh, I see."

"Oh, no, you don't! You don't know nothing about it."

Dame Beatrice smiled mirthlessly at the woman, then got up and walked out of the kitchen. Mrs. Cyril followed her to the door. Dame Beatrice heard the footsteps, but did not turn her head. The door was slammed violently behind her.

"Well, I bet you didn't get much change out of *her*," said Cyril Dysey, when she rejoined him on the bank of the stream. "She's a deep one when she likes, and not such a fool as she looks."

"I suppose she is very fond of Mr. Henry?"

"Fond of him? Devil knows! She's looked after him since he was three. Staying to tea?"

"It is very kind of you, but I think not."

"Afraid she might poison you, eh?" He laughed loudly and unconvincingly. "Oh, well, get aboard and I'll ferry you across."

"Is it true that Mr. Bonamy is expected home?" Dame Beatrice enquired.

"Bonamy coming home? Is that what she told you?"

"Yes, indeed. What are we to understand by it? Do you think it is true?"

"Well, I never believed he was dead."

"Will you ask Mr. Henry to come and see me again?"

"What do you want with Henry?"

"It is not what I want *with* him, but what I want *from* him."

"And that will be?"

"The truth."

"That's all very well, but, supposing he tells you the truth, where's that going to get you?"

"It is not a question of where it is going to get *me*, but of where it is *not* going to get *him*."

"Oh, and where's that?"

"Into court, on a charge of murder."

"I wish women would mind their own business!"

"I trust that you do not refer to me. You *will* ask Mr. Henry to come and see me, will you not?"

"Henry had nothing to do with those deaths."

"That is for him to prove, and, if he will not confide in me, I cannot help him."

"Oh, let the police arrest him, and me, too. They can't prove anything. Come on. Hop into the boat, unless you're staying to tea, and you said you wouldn't."

The boat had just reached the opposite bank when the sputtering sound of an outboard motor could be heard.

"Mr. Henry, I presume," said Dame Beatrice. Cyril Dysey handed her out, and then rowed back to the boathouse. She waited while Henry, in his dinghy, rounded the bend and could see her. Then she waved. Henry cut out his engine and let the boat drift towards her.

"Hullo!" he shouted in a cheerful tone. "How's tricks?"

"So you also have heard the news?" she said, as he leapt ashore. Henry hitched the painter round a post which had been planted opposite the chalet for this purpose, and grinned at her.

"All our troubles are over! Bonamy's coming home," he said. "And do you know what? He's bringing a half-breed wife and a baby boy with him."

"How do you know?" Dame Beatrice asked.

"Know? Etta told me. Actuated by spite and a determination to take me down a peg, undoubtedly, but, somehow, I'm sure it's true."

"When did you hear this?"

"Yesterday, as ever was, so today's the maddest, merriest day of all the glad new year."

"Why so?"

"Well, don't you see? If good old Bonamy is alive and well, and has also provided himself with a successor, there's nothing more for my uncle and me to worry about."

"What causes you to think that?"

"But, surely, it's obvious! If Bonamy is alive, he's the rightful heir and gets that gloomy old box of tricks, with its birds of ill-omen and its ghastly motto, and all the rest of it. That being so, any case the police may think they've built up against my uncle and me falls apart like a house of cards. Can't you see that?"

"Yes, if you and your uncle can prove that you *knew* that Mr. Bonamy was alive when Tom Dysey and your Uncle Eustace were murdered."

"Oh, I think we can by-pass that one." But his joyous confidence had evaporated. "You think so, don't you?" he asked with sudden concern.

"It depends upon your answer to a question I asked you some little time ago. Can you account for your movements on the night of Tom Dysey's death?"

"I've told you what I did."

"I think you told me what you did *not* do. Will you still hold to those statements? It is for you to decide."

"I should have thought it was equally to the point for me to account for my movements on the night Uncle Eustace was killed."

"But it has not been established with any exactitude which night it was when your Uncle Eustace was killed."

Henry looked at her.

"Well, what do you know!" he exclaimed.

"Having, in common parlance, given the game away, had you not better confide in me completely? I suggest it in your own interests."

"No, I'm damned if I do!" said Henry, with considerable violence. "No! You do your own dirty work—if you can!"

"In what year were you born?"

Henry stared at her.

"1943—not that it matters," he said. "Three years after Bonamy, so, you see, I've nothing to lose!"

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### The Vicar Ignores His Cloth

"This ae nighte, this ae nighte,  
Every nighte and alle,  
Fire and fleet and candle-lighte,  
And Christe receive thy saule."

*A Lyke—Wake Dirge*

"An odd bod, Henry, wouldn't you say?" enquired Laura.

"I should not so choose to describe him. His reactions, although somewhat violent, are perfectly comprehensible, I think. Incidentally, has it not occurred to you that we have now been presented with a most likely pair of participators in the murders of Mr. Thomas and Mr. Eustace?"

"I can't see beyond Cyril and Henry, especially now Henry has stuck his feet in, and refuses to tell us what he knows. There's no doubt he could help us if he wanted to."

"Poor Henry is between Scylla and Charybdis."

"Between the devil and the deep sea, is he?"

"I prefer my own metaphor."

"Naturally. But why?—I mean, why is he so between?"

"Because, whichever way Henry turns now, he is bound to incriminate someone, even if that someone should be himself. His would appear to be a straight choice, but it is a choice which, except in extremities, he is determined to avoid as long as he can."

"You speak, as often, in riddles. What's his choice? To sacrifice either his uncle or himself?"



"Oh, no. While I leave you to consider the implications of a most important fact which should have come to our notice earlier than it did, let me read to you certain extracts which I have culled from my study of the life-work of Mrs. Sarah Harrison of Devonshire."

"The same being...?"

"*The Housekeeper's Pocket Book, etc.*"

"Oh, cooking and so forth. What made you pick on that?"

"Because certain entries in the copy which I used have been underlined in ink."

"Well, I suppose the lady of the house to whom the book belonged had some favourite recipes."

"The underlinings do not altogether suggest that. Let me draw your attention to these extracts. I shall be surprised if they do not suggest to you what they have already suggested to me."

"I'm all agog. This isn't a leg-pull, is it?"

"Certainly not. It is in no way calculated to deceive."

"Read on, then."

Dame Beatrice produced the small notebook into which she had copied the entries and read aloud:

"'Take two Ounces of Jesuit's Bark, infuse it in Spring-water.'"

"Good heavens! Is this a clue to the whereabouts of the Ravens' Hoard, by any chance?" demanded Laura.

"I wondered that, myself. 'Take the Leaves of Rue, pick't from the stalks, and bruise them. N.B. You may occasionally change the Conserve of Rue for that of Roman Wormwood.'"

"Can't see how that bit helps."

"You will, later on, I think. 'If any soft or perished Place appear on the Outside, try how deep it goes, for the greater Part may be hid within.'"

"I begin to see what you mean."

"I thought you would. Lastly, 'Break off the dirty Ends, put Salt to them.'"

"Oh, dear! I'm befogged again."

"I think not. It seems to me that the extracts give a picture of the place where the Ravens' Hoard is or was hidden, and clear directions as to where to locate it."

"Half a minute! Suppose—although it sounds too good to be true—but suppose we find it? Does it belong to Bonamy Dysey?"

"I have no idea. There is one other marked passage. It seems to lead nowhere, and yet, if we are to accept the others as presumptive evidence, we cannot discount this one. It reads: 'Wormwood, Rosemary and Lavender, of each a like quantity, and Charity, two Handfuls,' and is referred to in the margin as 'Apportionment of the Treasure.'"

"The Family Bible!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Don't you see?" cried Laura. "Don't you remember the one thing which was stolen when thieves broke in at the home farm? The Family Bible was the only thing missing, and then it came back via one of the pig-sties."

"Dear me!" said Dame Beatrice. "I find your air of excitement infectious, but I see no occasion for your obvious emotion. What part does the Carters' Family Bible play in the affair?"

"Didn't you have a Family Bible in your home?"

"Not so far as I remember."

"Well, they're called Family Bibles, I gather (we haven't one, either, but Alice Boorman's grandmother has), because in the front there are spaces ruled out for births, marriages, and deaths, so you've a record, you see, of the family activities in these matters."

"I begin to perceive your drift."

"If the Carters are collaterals of the Dyseys, the Family Bible will have information, most likely, as to how and why. What kind of ink was used for those underlinings?"

"I know very little about the composition of inks. I believe the ancient Egyptians, seven thousand years ago,

used a carbonised form of ink, but that fact would not be likely to help us.”

“What colour is this underlining?”

“Mauve. But look for yourself.”

Laura took Mrs. Harrison’s book and leafed it through to find the marked passages.

“Mauve it is,” she said. “We’d have to get an expert’s opinion, but I read a book<sup>\*</sup> a year or two ago which said that mauve ink was first made in 1856. That sort of date would fit in with the possession of a Family Bible all right. With your permission, I will hie me to the home farm and request a loan of the heirloom.”

As it happened, she had no need to do so, for, at this moment, the vicar, who had been pursuing his studies in the Dysey library every evening, was shown in. He was carrying the tome in question. He had heard from old Mrs. Carter, Jerry’s grandmother, of the strange behaviour of the thief, and, upon examining the returned Bible, had come to certain conclusions which, in some excitement, he proceeded to impart.

“Here,” he said, laying the weighty and bulky book on the table and placing his right hand upon it, “we have a mine of information for which I am duly grateful.”

“The branches of the Dysey family tree, I am led to suppose,” said Dame Beatrice. “Laura informs me that these were often delineated at the front of the Family Bible.”

“She is right. In this particular case, the nicknames of some of the family are given, in addition to their baptismal names. Affectionately intended, no doubt, but, to my mind, in questionable taste when inscribed in the forefront of Holy Writ.” He smiled, and opened the heavy, leather-covered wooden boards of the book after he had unfastened the clumsy brass hasps which held them together. Dame Beatrice and Laura came to stand one on either side of him.

A series of egg-shaped lozenges, outlined in pale green and gold, and covered in the spidery writing of the middle and later nineteenth-century feminine calligrapher met the eye. One Thomas Dysey had been born, it appeared, in 1862 and had married Charlotte (maiden name omitted) in 1886. They had had issue. These were William (Wormwood) born 1887, married Nancy Wilkes 1909, died in battle 1916, Rowena (Rosemary) born 1888, died 1898, Lallie (Lavender) born 1890, died 1898 (presumably of the same infectious illness as had carried off her elder sister) and Charlotte (Charity) born 1892, married 1910 to Gerald Carter.

From William's marriage came Thomas (Tom) born 1912, married Etta Frome 1938, killed by accident 1962, Eustace (Mushy) and Cyril (Cyclops), twins, born 1914. The death of Eustace was not recorded. From Tom came Bonamy, born 1940, and from Charlotte's marriage to Gerald came John, born 1913, married Alice Dukes 1937, and from this marriage came Gerald (Jerry) born 1939, married Kate Marchbank 1963, and this marriage produced another John (Jacky), born 1965.

Dame Beatrice and Laura left the vicar to his note-taking and went down to the pleasant little morning-room on the ground floor.

"So if the Ravens' Hoard is ever found," said Laura, "it looks to me as though the Carters stand to get the lion's share of it."

"Really?" said Dame Beatrice. "What has suggested such a conclusion?"

"Your Mrs. Harrison. Doesn't she say 'Wormwood, Rosemary, and Lavender one each, Charity two?'"

Dame Beatrice eyed her secretary respectfully.

"I thought that even you, my dear Laura, would hardly have interpreted my thoughts so soon," she said. "Of course, we may be jumping to conclusions, but the Dysey nicknames do appear to have some significance, and it

certainly seems that the Carters may be more fortunate than the Dyseys if the Hoard is ever found."

"The return of the Family Bible via the pig-sty indicates that. Whoever returned it that way must have been pretty sick about something, I'd say, and the Carters had no reason to steal their own Bible and chuck it about," said Laura.

"But that would seem to argue that somebody— whoever purloined that Bible from the home farm—has knowledge of where the Hoard is hidden."

"Yes, but perhaps not *enough* knowledge, don't you think? I mean, if he knows where it is, what's to prevent him freezing on to it and keeping his mouth shut?"

"Nothing, so far as I can see."

"Ergo, he hasn't found it, and he realises that it won't do him much good when he does."

"I should have thought that it would be of considerable advantage to all the Dyseys, their finances being in the parlous state of which we have cognisance. My own opinion is that the thief returned the Bible in the manner he did because he dared not risk breaking into the farmhouse a second time."

"Then why return it at all?"

"Well, look at it," suggested Dame Beatrice. "Pick it up. What do you suppose it weighs?"

"Yes, I see what you mean," said Laura. "Not exactly the sort of thing you could shove away under your shirts and ties if you wanted to keep it hidden. But won't the murderer have another cut at casing the joint here, if he feels he's on the trail of the treasure?"

"I think the castle will entertain another uninvited visitor, if that is what you mean, but I also think that this invasion is unlikely until after we have given up our tenancy."

"Whom do *you* think pinched the Bible from the farmhouse?"

“What I think is not evidence.”

“Here, I’ll tell you what *is* evidence!” cried Laura, in sudden excitement. “It came to me as I spoke of casing the joint! The concealed entrance! The third entrance and exit! The way into the priest’s hole that we’ve known must be there, but haven’t found! I know where it is! Eureka!”

“Dear me!” remarked Dame Beatrice in the mildest of tones.

“Come on!” urged Laura. “I’ll show you. Better bring a torch. It’s getting dark.” She led the way to the side door. From the kitchen came a voice with the pronounced accent of the countryside monotonously counting in French from one to twenty. Zena, Dame Beatrice realised, was under instruction from Henri and Celestine. Laura, who was carrying the torch, led the way across the courtyard and into the kitchen garden. A paved way led beside the vegetable plot to the flanking wall of the castle, and the tower where Thomas Dysey’s body had been found.

“Now,” said Laura, in low, conspiratorial tones, “to find the way in.” She shone the torch on the bottom steps of the newel staircase. “I remembered Bellairs telling me that these last two are only of wood,” she went on. “He thought it was some sort of repair job, but it suddenly dawned on me that it must be another door to the priest’s hole.”

Dame Beatrice said nothing. She laid a skinny claw on Laura’s arm. They listened. Coming from somewhere beneath their feet, it seemed, was the sound of somebody moving about.

“I think,” Dame Beatrice murmured, “that we had better leave exploration until the morning. George will be in the kitchen with the others. We will tell him and Henri to wrap up warmly. With beer and cigarettes they will, no doubt, be happy enough to sit on cushions on these steps for an hour or two.”

Having carried out this plan and returned to the morning-room, they resumed their meditations upon the entries on the fly-leaves of the Family Bible, and Laura said, "I see. You mean that, when somebody was glancing through the Family Bible, probably, at the time, just for something to do, it struck him or her that this Wormwood, Rosemary, Lavender, and Charity business had something more in it than met the eye? I bet you're right, at that. Well, where do we go from here?"

This question was answered by the vicar, who, having tapped on the door, came in looking agitated.

"Dame Beatrice," he said, "I think you ladies would be well advised to barricade yourselves in this room. With your permission, I will ask your servants to do the same in the kitchen while I deal with the situation. There is a miscreant in the house."

"Dear me!" said Dame Beatrice. "What makes you think so?"

"I did not trouble to close the library door when you and Mrs. Gavin left me, and I have been aware for some time of strange noises emanating from the dining-room. I took no notice at first, but they became so persistent that I abandoned my researches and went into the dining-room in an essay to find out the cause of the disturbance. It seems to come from somewhere near the fireplace."

"Golly! The priest's hole!" said Laura, trying to sound surprised. "Let's take a look." Before either her employer or the vicar could say a word, she was out of the room and bounding up the broad, shallow treads of the oak staircase which led to the first floor and the principal rooms of the house. Dame Beatrice darted after her, and the vicar followed, but, before approaching the dining-room, Dame Beatrice made for her own room and picked up the powerful electric torch she kept there. The vicar ran into the library and picked up the heavy hod of coal which held pride of place beside the Tudor hearth. Then he entered the dining-

room, and, unable, in its evening gloom, to see anything, cried lustily, banging the hod of coal upon the wooden floor,

“Come out, sir! Come out of there at once! And have a mind upon your health! I am armed!”

“Stout work!” said Laura, almost in his ear. “Ah, here comes Mrs. Croc., the lady with the lamp!”

Dame Beatrice had brought not only her torch but a box of matches. Giving Laura the torch to hold, she directed her to focus its beam upon the long dining-table, which was plentifully furnished with candles in imitation silver sconces. These candles the temporary head of the house proceeded to light. Having done this, she approached the roped-off embrasure beside the fireplace to the accompaniment of a fusillade of blows from inside the panelling. She took a small whistle from her pocket and blew three short blasts on it.

The hammering ceased. She called out,  
“Who are you?”

There was no verbal reply, or, at any rate, none that the listeners could hear, for the frenzied knocking broke out again immediately. Laura stepped up to her employer and said,

“I’d better open up, don’t you think?” Before Dame Beatrice could reply, she had stepped over the rope which cordoned off that corner of the room and the door in the panelling swung slowly open as the floor sank silently beneath her feet. Dame Beatrice directed her torch towards the aperture, and the intruder behind the panelling fell forward and cannoned into Laura, who, thus projected backwards, caught her heel against the back of the lowered square of floorboards and fell over. The vicar flung lumps of coal at the figure which had emerged from the priest’s hole, causing it to shield its head with its arms before it fell over the prostrate Laura.

At this the vicar, in Laura’s phrase, went berserk. Throwing down the hod, which immediately caused lumps of coal to cascade all over that part of the floor, he uttered a



series of yelps reminiscent of an American college war-cry, and went into battle. Flinging himself on the enemy, he dragged him off Laura and, lifting him like a sack of coals, dashed him back against the silken rope of the embrasure. This broke, throwing the intruder full length at Dame Beatrice's feet. She shone her torch into his eyes.

"Ah, it is you, Mr. Cyril," she said, without obvious surprise. Cyril Dysey rose slowly to his feet and felt the back of his head. The vicar picked up a heavy lump of coal and was balancing it under his chin, in the manner of a man about to put the shot, when Laura picked herself up, and the trap-door and the panelling, taking their time, as usual, gracefully resumed their former positions.

"All right," grunted Cyril. "No more rough-housing. I'll come quietly."

"Not until you are rendered harmless," said the vicar. "Mrs. Gavin, if you are feeling equal to making the effort, would you kindly remove the handkerchief from my left sleeve and tie Mr. Dysey's wrists together whilst I prepare to knock his brains out if he resists you? Now, sir, hold out your arms at full length with your wrists placed together."

The procession down to the morning-room was a ludicrous one. The prisoner was ordered to remain where he was. Dame Beatrice and her torch were requested to descend the stairs and light the way for the others. Laura, who had been commanded to take possession of the dining-room poker, went next. When they were in position at the foot of the staircase the captive followed, attended closely by the vicar and the lump of coal.

"And now," said Dame Beatrice mildly, when the procession had reached the morning-room, "perhaps Mr. Cyril will explain his uninvited presence in the castle at this hour of the evening. Please be seated, vicar. I do not regard Mr. Dysey as a menace to our safety."

"No, of course I'm not," said Cyril, "and I'd appreciate it if you'd untie my wrists. All this was quite unnecessary. I can

explain everything.”

The vicar took the poker in masterful manner from Laura, and stood over the pair of them while she untied the knotted handkerchief.

“Yes?” prompted Dame Beatrice, when this operation was completed.

“I couldn’t find the dratted lever in the dark. Thought I knew just where to put my hand on it, but I haven’t been in the priest’s hole for more than twenty years, and I suppose one forgets, that’s all.”

“But how did you get into it in the first place?” demanded Laura. “Talk about breaking and entering!” she added severely.

“I know, I know. No need to make a song and dance! I’m in the wrong, I suppose.”

“What made you put yourself in the wrong?” Dame Beatrice asked. Cyril Dysey looked at her.

“Never mind that now,” he said. “Bonamy’s come home. I’m so upset I don’t really know what I’m doing. Makes it seem as though all’s been done in vain.”

“Upset, sir!” cried the vicar indignantly, before either of the others had an opportunity to ask what Dysey meant. “*You* are not the person to feel upset! Do you realise that, but for my fortuitous presence, these ladies might have been frightened out of their wits?”

Laura caught Dame Beatrice’s eye and grinned, but neither of them denied this slanderous and untruthful supposition. As Laura said later, “Every dog must have his day, and I don’t suppose the vicar has had the chance to be a hero since he gave up playing Rugby football.” To this equally slanderous and untruthful statement, Dame Beatrice replied, “It must take a considerable amount of muscular Christian courage to run a Youth Club in these days, I think, especially in the district where he worked before he came to Ravens Dysey.”

But before this conversation took place, which, needless to say, it did after both the vicar and Cyril Dysey had departed, Dame Beatrice addressed the latter.

“Excuse me for one moment, Mr. Dysey.” She went out of the room, presumably to release George and Henri from their vigil, and soon returned.

---

\* *Science in Crime Detection*—Nigel Morland, 1958.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### The Ravens' Nest

"Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,<sup>\*</sup>  
And I'll pike out his bonny blue e'en;  
Wi' ae lock o' his gowden hair  
We'll theek our nest when it grows bare."

*The Twa Corbies*

"Mr. Bonamy Dysey is actually in England?" asked Dame Beatrice. "We had heard as much, of course."

"With wife and child," said Cyril. "It seems he married a Spanish Moroccan girl named Reina and has an infant son they call Luis."

"And where are they now?"

"Bedded down at my place. I and my housekeeper are staying at the farm."

"And Mr. Henry?"

"The police arrested him this afternoon. I wonder whether they'll have the infernal impudence to arrest me, too? If they do, you'll have to get us off, you know."

"Yes, the police will arrest you. I have already sent for them."

"Eh? Here, what's this? You're not going to give me in charge?"

"Am I not?"

"You can't do it! Anyway, you're not on the telephone here!"

"No, but my chauffeur is on his way to the home farm with orders from me to telephone the police from there."

"Oh, nonsense! You haven't spoken to your man since you got me out of that priest's hole. I say! It was your man blocking up the exit! You—you—!"

"You can scarcely blame me," said Dame Beatrice smoothly. "How was I to know who was in the priest's hole? Anyhow, I expect the police at any moment."

Her expectations were realised at the end of another hour, for her maid appeared and announced, with her usual disdain, that the police had arrived. The inspector and his sergeant followed her into the room. Cyril Dysey turned purple and began to rise from his chair, but the vicar placed a large hand on his shoulder and thrust him down again.

"Say nothing, my dear Dysey," he advised him, "and go quietly. Nothing is proved against you yet. For my own part," he added, turning to the inspector, "I do not believe him guilty."

"That's as maybe, sir," the inspector replied, and, having charged the fermenting Cyril with breaking and entering, he took him away.

"Well, that takes care of the chalet pair, at any rate for a time," said Dame Beatrice.

"Did you know the police had arrested Henry?" demanded Laura.

"No, but I thought they might. They have suspected him all along. Anyhow, now that Mr. Bonamy and his son have arrived in the neighbourhood, it is just as well to have Mr. Cyril and Mr. Henry out of the way. I do not know, Vicar, whether you would wish to continue your studies?"

"I think not. I think not. I am emotionally disturbed. I am surprised and very much upset that you should have had such a frightening experience, but I did not think you would have given Mr. Cyril Dysey in charge."

Dame Beatrice grinned mirthlessly and did not attempt to defend her action.

"And what's *our* next move?" asked Laura, when the vicar had gone. "I say, you don't really think Cyril and Henry are the murderers, do you?"

Dame Beatrice answered the first question, but not the second one.

"We will get George to drive us to the chalet. Mr. and Mrs. Cyril rowed themselves across the river and then he walked here, leaving her to get to the farm where, later, he proposed to join her, but I am not inclined for river banks and the lakeside tonight, so we will take the longer way by road."

"But what's the idea? Oh, of course! You think somebody may have a pop at eliminating Bonamy and his kid! In that case, wouldn't it be a better plan to hand the guard-duty over to the gendarmes?"

"I think not. I do not suspect that an attempt on the lives of Mr. Bonamy and his son will be made tonight, but I shall be surprised if we turn out to be their only visitors."

"As happens far too often, you speak in riddles. If you don't suspect that the killers are going to try to do their stuff, why have you had Cyril arrested? The only point in having him and Henry flung into the jug is to make quite certain that if and when an attempt *is* made on Bonamy, they can't possibly be implicated. Wasn't that your idea?"

"Well, there *is* that point of view, of course."

Laura regarded her employer with deep distrust, and snorted indignantly.

"You might let me in on your secrets," she said "Why *are* we going to the chalet?"

"In the words of the late Mr. Asquith..."

Laura bit back some rude words, and said, in place of them:

"Do we go armed? It will be two against two, you know, if you turn out to be wrong about an attempt being made tonight, and I don't see Henrietta and that sister of hers—

Cyril's housekeeper-wife—sticking at much. After all, with two murders to their credit (if you can call it that) already..."

"I do not think we shall be running into danger tonight. If I thought we should, I would not have agreed so readily to your accompanying me to the chalet."

"You mean that, when Mrs. Cyril realises that Cyril hasn't come home, she'll suspect there are wheels within wheels and won't chance her arm? Well, you're the psychologist, so I daresay you're right. Nevertheless, much as I dislike firearms, I'd be a lot happier for once if you toted your tiny rod along with you."

"Very well, and you will arm yourself with...?"

"A stout ashplant. When do we start?"

"I think we will give Mrs. Cyril Dysey a little time to realise that her husband is a long while gone from the farm. I imagine he may be telling the truth when he said that she was there. Perhaps you would go and tell George that we shall need the car in an hour from now."

"You know, there's one thing I don't understand about these murderers, whoever they are," said Laura, when she had returned from this errand. "If their idea was to secure the inheritance for Henry—and it's the only motive which makes sense—why haven't they killed Cyril before this? They obviously thought the memorial in the church meant that Bonamy was dead, but with Cyril only in his fifties he may live another twenty or thirty years and, in the end, double-cross Henry by leaving the property elsewhere."

"I think such a course is the last one which Mr. Cyril would contemplate taking, but one never knows. The thing which puzzles *me* about the murders is the lapse of time between the deaths of Mr. Thomas and Mr. Eustace."

"I suppose they wanted the hunt to die down, and any possible clues to disappear, before they tried again."

"Possibly. Another possibility is simply that the opportunity to kill Mr. Eustace was a long time in presenting itself. It may even be that there was some *reluctance* to kill

Mr. Eustace. However, all these things may be made clear later on."

"I can't wait to find out how one gets into the house from that flanking tower," said Laura. "Gavin suspected it, you know."

"It was most intelligent of you to deduce that there was an entrance there."

"Oh, no, it wasn't, either! We've often wondered why Tom's body was left there."

"There seems only one rational explanation. The original intention, I fancy, was to leave it in the priest's hole."

"Well, why wasn't it left in it?"

"A moment's thought will give you the answer to that."

"Oh, yes, of course. They realised that Eustace also knew how to get into the priest's hole, and that, if they put the body there, he'd guess at once who dunnit. But that implicates either Cyril or Mrs. Tom Dysey up to the hilt, doesn't it?"

"Or the two of them in collusion, unless, of course, it was Eustace who murdered Tom and then got killed in his turn, but to me it seems unlikely that that is what happened."

"I still think a strong case can be made out against those two sisters, Henrietta Slepe and Mrs. Cyril, you know. If they *are* the guilty ones, I bet Cyril was only snooping around in the hope of finding the Ravens' Hoard. I say, he must have had a facer when you gave him in charge! Will you really let him stand trial and all that?"

"Oh, yes. Why not? After all, he did break in, did he not?"

"Well, he wasn't here to do any harm, was he? And the vicar was about right to be somewhat astounded by your action, although, of course, what the poor man couldn't know is that in this particular case the end justifies the



means. Couldn't you have pointed that out to him? I hate to have people cast a slur on your good name."

"It was better that the vicar should be kept in ignorance of my aims just at present. Rehearse for me your reasons for suspecting Henrietta and Mrs. Cyril of the murders."

"Well, they're obvious enough. Henrietta is Henry's mother, and so would naturally go out of her way to advance his interests, and Mrs. Cyril seems to have acted as his foster-mother for a goodly number of years and, as well as that, I suppose, as Henry is her nephew by marriage and Cyril is her husband, she thought she saw her way, with Henrietta's help, to doing them both a bit of good."

"Yes. Of course, we have no proof that either woman was actually fond of Henry, have we? The only person who has given evidence of doting upon him is Mr. Cyril."

"Oh, women always dote on their sons. It goes without saying."

"You astound me, but I do not venture to contradict you. You had better go into the kitchen and get something to eat. Our visit to the chalet may be a long one, since I think we may have a vigil to keep before we enter the building."

"There's a romantic Childe Roland flavour about this expedition which appeals to my childish nature. Right, I'll go kitchenwards and stoke up, then."

Half an hour or so later they went out to the waiting car. It was a pitch-black night—a night, as Laura observed, for treasons, stratagems, and spoils—and George, at his employer's behest, drove slowly. The car crawled out through the gatehouse archway and covered the four miles to the main road at what seemed to Laura a timeless pace, but which took about twelve minutes. It then swung to the left and picked up a decorous thirty m.p.h., but not for long. It swung to the left again down a narrow lane scarcely wide enough to avoid brushing the hedgerows on either side,

came out upon a common, dropped to sea-level and, just before it reached a bridge across the river, it turned to the left for the last time and came upon the chalet from the rear, on the side which faced away from the stream.

There were no lights to be seen anywhere in the small building except one single, almost indistinguishable glow in what Laura knew must be a small window in the bedroom which formed part of the loft. The car drew up on a grass verge off the road and Dame Beatrice and Laura got out. George locked the car after he had picked a heavy spanner out of his tool-kit and, unasked but faithful, followed them up to the back door and then round the side of the building to the front. Here, almost in the doorway, they halted.

There was the unearthly stillness of the black night around them. The river, deep and slow-flowing, made no sound, and all the customary tiny, spine-chilling noises of the night seemed absent. There was a distinct nip, heralding the beginning of autumn, in the air.

"Queer, no lights," muttered Laura.

"Not at all. I expect the household is in bed. The glimmer from the top window will come from a nightlight in the child's bedroom," Dame Beatrice murmured in reply.

"Well, I hope we don't have to wait long. It's perishing cold."

"Go back and wait in the car, then."

"Not me! If there's going to be any fun, I'm not going to be done out of it. How soon do you think something will happen?"

"I do not venture to prophesy. How long do you think it takes to walk here from the home farm?"

"So you *do* expect those two beauties!"

"I expect Mrs. Cyril Dysey, not her sister. Let us go to the bank of the river and listen for the sound of the boat. Mr. Cyril will have left it tied up on the other side."

"But she's got to come from the home farm, if he was speaking the truth."

"She will still need a boat to cross the river to get to the chalet, unless she comes by road."

"Oh, yes, of course."

They were silent until Dame Beatrice said to the chauffeur,

"I assure you, George, that Mrs. Gavin and I are in no danger whatsoever tonight. Return to the car and smoke a cigarette. I have my small whistle and will blow three blasts if we need you."

"Very good, madam."

"You seem very certain about this 'no danger' business," said Laura, when the chauffeur had gone.

"Anyway, you've got your little gat, so I suppose it's all right."

"So much so that there is really no need for you to remain with me."

"Well, I shall."

They fell silent again, and, to Laura, an interminable time seemed to pass before they saw the light of a torch on the opposite bank and, shortly afterwards, heard the sound of oars. Dame Beatrice waited until a dark shape on the dully gleaming river indicated the approach of the boat, and then shone her own torch.

"Who's that?" asked a high, nervous voice.

"Dame Beatrice Bradley and Mrs. Gavin," Dame Beatrice replied. "Who are you?"

"Carrie Dysey. Have you seen my husband? He was going to call at the castle, so he said, to ask you to make the police let Henry go. I hope as he wasn't a nuisance to you?"

"I hope you will not mind very much, but I have given him in charge."

Dame Beatrice and Laura were standing beside the little staithe which led to the boathouse. Dame Beatrice kept her torch trained on the boat, and Mrs. Cyril, with the use of

long practice, apparently, stepped ashore with the painter in her hand and tied up to a post.

"What have you come here for?" she asked.

"For the same reason as that which brings *you* here, I imagine," Dame Beatrice replied.

"I wanted to make sure the little boy was all right."

"Let us go up to the chalet together, then, and enquire after him."

"I didn't like it when Cyril didn't come back."

"Of course you didn't."

"And you've really given him in charge? That's a good one, that is! But you haven't proved anything against him, have you?"

"I sent for the police because he had broken into my house."

"Oh, I see! You're a deep one, you are, and no mistake! I hope as things are all right here. Don't seem to be no lights."

"I expect they have all gone to bed. I hope they will not be alarmed when we knock them up."

"I've come to warn 'em. I couldn't do it when they first come, because Cyril and Henry would have heard me. Will we knock, or will I use my latch-key?"

"I think we had better knock. In any case, I expect the door is bolted." Dame Beatrice followed this expression of opinion by beating a loud tattoo upon the door. There was a pause, then she knocked again. A light shone out from behind the curtains of a room on the right of the front door and a man's voice asked,

"Who's that?"

"It's me, Mrs. Cyril," the housekeeper replied, "and I've got the ladies with me what's rented the castle from your ma. Let us in. We've got something to tell you."

"I'm not letting anybody in at this time of night. Go away and come back in the morning."

As he said this, another light appeared, this time in the entrance hall, and a woman's voice said, in a foreign accent, "What is the trouble, Bonamy dear?"

"I don't know, love. It's Uncle Cyril's wife. She says she's got something to tell me, and she has the ladies from the castle with her, but I don't see the fun of letting people in at this time of night, with what happened to my father and Uncle Eustace."

"Very well, Mr. Bonamy," said Dame Beatrice. "We are relieved to know that you are so cautious about opening the door. Can you hear me quite clearly?"

"Yes, of course. Why?"

"I have some questions to ask you. They may be directly concerned with the deaths of your father and your uncle."

"Fire away, then, although I'm damned if I know who you are, or what your game is."

"Are you really Mr. Thomas Dysey's son?"

"To the best of my belief, I am."

"Is Henry Dysey your full brother?"

"No, I don't think so. I think he's Uncle Cyril's son by my mother, after she was married."

"As I suspected. Do you remember, as a little boy, being taken to the doctor?"

"All small kids are taken to the doctor."

"With multiple injuries?"

"Oh, I see. Yes, my mother used to turn nasty. Henry got the blame from my father, I believe, but it was my mother who used to clock me. She hated me."

"Why?"

"She hated my father. She didn't want to have me. I think he forced her to."

"Why did she not marry Mr. Cyril?"

"How on earth should I know? I suppose she wanted the property. Uncle Eustace and my father had nothing much

but their pensions from the R.A.F. and the Army. Not that the estate is worth much, either, come to that."

"Why did you go to live abroad?"

"Got into trouble in England."

"Has your mother ever been to visit you during this or last summer?"

"Are you crazy? I tell you she hated my guts."

"I can tell you where she visited," said Mrs. Cyril. "She visited this chalet-bungalow, this very one. I was turned out, if you please! Not as it ever bothered me. I used to go and stay with Henrietta—my sister, you know."

"I *knew* it was Mrs. Dysey I spotted, the first time I ever walked along the river," said Laura. "But you came back after that. You were here when we had lunch with Cyril and Henry."

"That's right. They got wind-up when they knew you must have met Etta and were living at the castle, so I were sent for, all in a hurry, and Etta went to a little cheap place as my sister knew of in France. My sister Henrietta, well, she's educated, you see, and have travelled, and knows where to go and stay abroad."

"So that explains the postcards to the Wick girls," muttered Laura.

"Anything else? I want to get back to bed!" called Bonamy.

"Why have you only just returned to this country?" asked Dame Beatrice.

"Liked it where I was, but fell down on my luck. Besides, although I didn't want the castle and the damn-fool estates, I didn't see why my nipper should be done out of what was rightfully his, so we packed our bags and here we are."

"When did you hear of your father's death?"

"Not until somebody sent me the English papers reporting on Uncle Eustace. Now, is *that* all?"

"Just one more thing, if you will be so good. What do you know about the Ravens' Hoard?"

She heard Bonamy laugh.

"Would it help if I told you I'm a reformed character and have become a Catholic?" he asked. Dame Beatrice cackled in reply, and addressed herself to Mrs. Cyril.

"We will give you a lift back to the home farm," she said.

"Yes, well, p'raps you'd better. I've got an idea there's somebody on the other side of the water been listening to what we been saying. Sound travels acrorst a river. I reckon not much 'as been missed by the murdering cat!"

Dame Beatrice, too, had been aware of an unseen listener.

"Goodnight, Mrs. Dysey!" she called across the stream.

"Well!" said Laura, as they headed towards the car. "Do you mean to tell me that Cyril and Etta are the murderers after all? But can you prove it? I mean, they seem to have covered their tracks pretty well."

"Not from me they haven't," said the housekeeper. "I shan't give evidence in court against Cyril, but I'm willing to tell you all I know, and then you can do what you like about it, though I doubt whether you'll be able to prove much, as your friend says."

"I can prove enough to make certain of a prosecution so that there is no need for you to incriminate your husband. There is only one question I would like to put to you. Can you tell me whether the Ravens' Hoard has ever come to light?" Dame Beatrice asked.

"The Ravens' Hoard? I've never heard of it. What would it be—money?"

"More probably jewels, I think. Oh, there *is* one other point. It concerns Mr. Henry Dysey. You remember the night on which Mr. Thomas was killed? Mr. Cyril was invited to dine at the castle, and accepted the invitation. Mr. Henry may or may not have been invited, but, at any rate, he did not go. Have you any idea what he *did* do? I presume you were at the chalet at the time?"

“No, I wasn’t. I met Henrietta and we went to the pictures in Warwick and I stayed the night at her place. Her landlady can prove it, if you want proof. I got back on the seven o’clock bus next morning in time to get their nine o’clock breakfast. Henry was in the house then, but, of course, Cyril wasn’t, because of Thomas’s death. He was still at the castle.”

“And you do not know what Mr. Henry was doing that night?”

“He won’t thank me for telling you. He went poaching.”

“Poaching?”

“That’s right. You ask Percy Bellairs. Henry won’t say nothing to give his pals away, but Percy promised me faithful that if it comes to the Assizes for Henry, him and the lads would speak up.”

---

\* – breast-bone.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### Retreat from Castle Perilous

“They’ve castin’ black bullets twice six and  
forty,  
And ae the black bullet fell on bonnie Annie.  
O I’d bury my love on the high banks o’ Yarrow,  
But the wood it is dear, and the planks they  
are narrow.”

*Bonnie Annie*

“So Henry emerges without a stain on his character! A likely story, as Mrs. Peachum would say,” observed Laura, after they had dropped the housekeeper at the home farm and had returned to the castle.

“I agree with you. Henry has suppressed guilty knowledge of the facts, if nothing more. Of course, to be fair, one must admit that a case could have been made out against Henrietta and her sister, for the reason which you yourself gave. The only things against it were, first, that I could not find out whether either of them was fond enough of Mr. Henry to take the risk of committing two murders for his sake, and, second, I could not see how they would have known enough about the priest’s hole to think of putting one of the bodies there.”

“As we’re agreed that there must have been an accomplice, there’s another possible combination, isn’t there?”

"There could be several, I suppose. In this case you refer to...?"

"Cyril and Mrs. Cyril. She must have been implicated in some way or other. She knew, for instance, that Etta Dysey used to go and stay at the chalet."

"It was explained that Mrs. Cyril was of less expense as a wife than as a paid housekeeper, and, of course, although she was wife in name, her duties as housekeeper do not seem to have altered. However, the fact that Mr. Cyril married her *before* the death of Mr. Thomas seems to indicate that that death had already been planned."

"It seems to me," went on Laura, warming to her work, "that there's something in this business which cuts both ways. If a wife can't be made to give evidence against her husband—that's what you mean, isn't it?—neither can *he* be made to incriminate *her*."

"Your arguments appear to be sound."

"But they don't get us beyond the fact that Cyril and Etta are guilty. Oh, well, if that's what you think, that's it, so far as I am concerned. Shall we have to appear at the Assizes?"

"I shall. I found Mr. Eustace's body."

"So where do we go from here?"

"To bed. In the morning we will institute a search for the Ravens' Hoard."

"You really believe it exists?"

"No, but I think we might amuse ourselves by trying to find out where they hid it. Mr. Eustace was looking for it, I think. We, with our powers of deduction and the invaluable life-work of Mrs. Sarah Harrison..."

"I wish Hamish could be here! He'd revel in it, wouldn't he?"

"Tomorrow I think we must drink champagne."

"Why?" asked Laura suspiciously.

"Because it is the first time, so far as my memory serves me, that you have expressed a wish for the company

of your son.”

Laura was up on the following morning at an hour which was unusually early, even for her. With great caution she crept downstairs to the side door and unbolted it. Then she crossed the courtyard and walked along the paved path at the side of the vegetable garden until she came to the castle wall and the flanking tower. Dawn, grey but with a promise of gold to come, was beginning to break as, with a sense of eerie expectancy, she stepped heavily upon the bottom step of the newel staircase. Nothing happened. Placing her hands on the walls of the inside of the tower, she jumped up and down, but still with no result.

She tried the second stair, but, again, nothing happened, so she felt all over the walls for projections which, when pressed, might work an Open Sesame. There were no such projections.

At the first turn of the stair there was a deeply-embraured little window. She climbed up to it, determined to try everything, likely and unlikely, which might serve to open up the passage from the tower into the house. The tiny slit had a single iron bar across it. This was vertical. It was also very rusty. Laura regarded it doubtfully and then, standing on tiptoe, she tugged on it with all her force. Still nothing happened.

Laura looked at the rust stains on her palms, rubbed them off as well as she could on the seat of the slacks she was wearing, and climbed to the top of the tower. The morning air was nippy and very fresh, and she stood for a few minutes looking out on the landscape. Smoke in the distance indicated that the fire in the kitchen at the home farm had already been lighted, but the green hill was high before it dropped to the valley, so that she could not see the farm buildings. She turned and began to stroll along the top of the curtain wall. Soon she came opposite the frowning keep, but the curtain wall had been built well clear of it, and it was impossible to see the inside of the massive building

She walked on until she came to the gatehouse. Here she descended one newel staircase, crossed under the archway and, mounting a second stairway, ducked under a much smaller and lower arch to get into the porter's room.

"Got it!" she said aloud. "No, I haven't! It probably worked a portcullis or the drawbridge." The object which had caught her attention was an ancient iron wheel along whose flanged edge ran a chain. She gave the wheel a wrench by putting both hands on one of its iron spokes (of which it possessed only four, in the shape of a cross) and thrusting downwards. Nothing budged.

Disgusted, she concluded her perambulations and, having reached her starting-point, descended to the courtyard to find the chauffeur, George, washing himself under the pump which was being operated for him with almost religious fervour by Zena. As Laura came up, Zena handed him a towel.

"Hullo, George," said Laura. "I say, when you're dried and dressed, I wish you'd come over to that tower and solve a problem for me."

"Mr. Henri and I solved it last night, madam, after you and madam and the police force had removed Mr. Dysey from the premises."

"Damn!" said Laura, disgustedly. "What knob did you press that I couldn't find, then?"

"It is not a question of knobs, madam, but of leverage."

"How do you mean?"

"If you'd care to come and take a look, madam." Laura went with him to the foot of the tower. "Realising that madam must have had some definite purpose in requesting Mr. Henri and myself to seat ourselves at the foot of the tower, madam, I said to Mr. Henri, 'Hullo,' I said. 'Dirty work afoot. Madam must think there's a miscreant under these steps.' Well, we sat on, as advised, until the party, as you might say, was over, and the police force, together with the miscreant, had driven off, and then I said to Mr. Henri, 'What

price we have a dekho?' Well, he was game, of course, but, before we got started, I had the message that the car would be wanted to go out to the river. Still, that left us nice time, so we got some candles from the kitchen and I had my torch, and we took a look. Here's how it works."

He knelt down and put a forefinger into each of what looked like two small ventilator holes in the strut of the bottom stair. It, and the one above it, seemed to fold back like two sticks of a fan, and there, before Laura's fascinated gaze, was a flight of steps. George removed his fingers.

"Watch this," he said. He counted aloud to ten. "Just gives anybody nice time to get down the steps." Without human aid, the two steps slid back into position. "You'd never notice those two holes, in the ordinary way," he said. "That's the beauty of 'em."

"Then how did *you* notice them?" asked Laura.

"It's on account of messing about with cars and gadgets all my life, madam, I expect. Anyway, there it is, and a real little daisy, too. There's likely a way of opening up again from the inside, I wouldn't be surprised. Madam must have thought so, anyway, and so did the miscreant we heard hammering and yelling while we sat there."

"Well, I'll go and have some breakfast, and then I'll bring Dame Beatrice along and demonstrate the miracle to her."

"Very good, madam. I'd better be on hand, then."

"We shall need you here, and Henri in the dining-room, so that I've got two bolt-holes. Dame Beatrice will insist on that, I expect."

Henri, therefore, was shown where to stand in order that the panelling in the dining-room might remain open, and Laura lowered herself into the abyss when George operated the tower steps. She had Dame Beatrice's big torch, switched it on, and found herself in a narrow passage which descended fairly steeply for a bit and ended in a flight of steps. Laura ascended these and found a doorway on her

left, but, broken only by the stone platform which accommodated the doorway, the steps descended again to another passage. She tried the door, but it remained firmly fastened. She listened. Celestine and Zena must be in the kitchen, she thought, but the door was soundproof. She hammered on it, and shouted, but there was no response.

"Been kept locked, when not in use, ever since the food was stolen, I suppose," she said aloud. "No, that can't be the answer. Eustace stole food a good many times. There must be a way of opening it from this side. If so, why didn't Cyril use it? Oh, well, we can find out later." She descended the stairs and was met by a steady draught. At the end of the next passage, which was considerably shorter than the previous one, there was a kind of baffle-door giving two exits to the ground floor of the keep.

Laura stepped out into the dimness which her torch scarcely served to illumine, and walked round to where the passage to the priest's hole led into the building. Then she looked back. The exit by which she had left was completely screened.

There was something else in the undercroft, however. As she looked at the huddled shape which lay only a few yards from where she stood, she realised what it must be. She shone her torch on it to make sure, and then hastened along the ramped passage to the priest's hole and the patient Henri waiting on duty in the dining-room.

"I suppose, mam," said the inspector, when Mrs. Dysey's body had been removed, "she thought it was better than serving a life sentence. Anyway, we found a full confession on the body, and we've got Mr. Cyril, anyway. You'll be wanted at the inquest, Mrs. Gavin, I'm afraid," he went on, "and Mr. Bonamy will have to give evidence of identification, being next of kin. I've telephoned Scotland Yard, mam, and Mr. Gavin reckons he'll be with you tomorrow some time.

You, Mrs. Gavin, must have had a bit of a shock, and will be glad to have him with you."

"I don't think it was much of a shock, in a way," said Laura, when he had gone, "although I expect I turned a bit green about the gills when I found her. Still, I can't pretend I feel very sentimental about her end. Do you really think she would have tried to kill Bonamy and the baby?"

"She seems to have been a cruel and ruthless woman. I think, however, that the next victim would have been Mrs. Cyril Dysey. For one thing, she knew too much, and could have given evidence against Mrs. Etta, even if not against Mr. Cyril."

"And, of course, I suppose Etta and Cyril wanted to live together for good and all. Cyril seems to have been a bit of dirty work altogether, doesn't he?"

"He took care of Henry, of course. By the way, was there ever any rational explanation of the singing which Zena heard?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you? It was Eustace, as we thought. Grandmother Carter told me that he always sang, and didn't even know he was doing it. Didn't he sing while you were treating him after the war?"

"He did not have an opportunity. We talked all the time. Besides, I expect he sang only when he was alone."

"Oh, what you might call one of these bathroom-type operators. Well, look here, we've got the rest of the day before us, and we can't leave here, in any case, until after the inquest, so why don't we look for the hiding-place of the Hoard? I must do something to take my mind off Mrs. Dysey. Let's have another go at the underlined passages in *The Housekeeper's Pocket Book*."

"I will leave you to it."

"All right. I'll have a go. What are *you* going to do?"

"Cope with the visitors. Have you forgotten that it is Saturday afternoon?"

"But, in view of what's happened..."

"Nothing has been made public yet, and this is the last time the place will be open until next May."

"Oh, Lord! I'd better turn to and help."

"No, no. Pursue your studies. I will send for you if I need you."

As it happened, the weather at midday turned very wet. Dame Beatrice sat in the morning-room, from whose window she could command the gatehouse archway. Laura, assured by her employer that there would be no visitors in such weather, repaired to the library to ponder upon Jesuit bark and Roman wormwood.

At half-past three a car drove in under the gatehouse archway and up to the front door of the house. Gavin and his son got out. Dame Beatrice did not wait for them to pull the bell, but went to meet them.

"Oh, Mrs. Dame, dear," said Hamish, rushing at her and hugging her, "isn't it super? Old Earthworm's been made an F.R.S. It seems it's a very good thing to be. He's the Head's brother, you know, so we've all been given a long nepotic week-end if our parents want us to have it, and I don't have to go back to school until Tuesday morning, so I wired Scotland Yard—it was a super thing to do, and when Canford Major heard of it he put me in the Colts XV, which you generally have to be at least eleven to get into, and, of course, I'm not eleven until next year, although I'm bigger and heavier than some of the men who *are* eleven, and worth my place, I think."

"Nepotic?" said Dame Beatrice. "Robert, dear, this *is* a pleasant surprise. Laura is in the library."

"Yes, nepotic," said Hamish, hanging on to the thin, surprisingly muscular arm of his ally while his father went bounding up the shallow, broad-treaded stairs. "It's a word which means giving benefits and things to your relations, whereas, if they *weren't* your relations, they wouldn't get them. In the ordinary way, I believe it's considered rather a *dim* way to behave, but when it means we get a long week-



end just because old Earthworm is the Head's brother, well, I'm all for it. The chaps who can't go home get a fireworks display and rather a lot of sardines and cake and things, but I don't grudge it them. I'd ever so much rather be here. I never thought I'd see the castle again. Did you know it had a treasure? I mean, it *did* have a treasure. It's gone now."

"What do you mean—it's gone?" asked Laura, coming down the stairs with her husband.

"Old Mrs. Carter told me when I took my pig up to her bedroom to show her. It's a very good story."

"Was she sure it had gone?"

"Oh, yes, mamma, quite sure. She told me how to find the place where it had been hidden—at least, she told me where to look for the clues, but I didn't know how to work them out."

"I might be able to help you," said Laura.

"Good. Tea first, then. I'm starving."

"Come to think of it, so am I," said Laura. "I'll get my notes, and we can talk about them while we eat."

"Dame B. and I will leave you to it, then," said Gavin, relieved to find that his wife had already recovered from the shock of rinding Etta Dysey's body. "Come on, Dame B. Let's have our tea in the morning-room and shove these treasure-hunters up to the library."

"What have you so far, mamma?" Hamish enquired, studying Laura's notes. "Oh, I see. Well, Jesuit bark—yes, old Mrs. Carter told me about the Jesuits, and, of course, I've read about them in history, although, actually, we're not up to the sixteenth century yet. Roman wormwood—well, Roman could be Julius Caesar and those sort of people, or it could be the Catholics. Taken with the Jesuit bit, it would mean the Catholics."

"Yes, I'd got as far as that."

"It's just a pointer, like Captain Flint's skeleton of a sailor. Well, now." He bit a large section off a buttered scone. "Spring water. Hm! *Could* be the lake or the—no! I've

got it! It's the pump in the courtyard! It's fed from a spring. Bellairs told me so. The spring feeds a well, of course, but shouldn't think that matters. 'Try how deep it goes, for the greater part may be hid within'—why, that's it, mamma! It must be in the well!"

"Have been in the well," amended Laura.

"Oh, yes, of course," agreed Hamish, slightly deflated. "What's this next bit?—'dirty ends, put salt to them?'—I don't see much meaning in that. Do you think it means we ought to take a pinch of salt with this information, and the treasure was never in the well at all? Have you anything else to go on?"

"No, I'm afraid not. I kept one or two bits of the diary."

"So did I—the bits Mrs. Dame copied out for me and you typed, but I'm sure they're nothing to do with the treasure. Let's look at yours, may I? Hm! What have we here?—'very uneasy on account of his suspicions I know where it lies'—that *must* refer to the treasure, but the rest of it, and the man dying, don't seem to help at all. Let's go back to the idea of the well. Now, the pump would be later than the actual well, so we concentrate on the well. That must be—have you ever seen it, mamma?"

"No, I can't say I have. Most castles had two at least—one in the bailey and the other, where enemies couldn't get at it to poison it, in the keep."

"Oh, if it's in the keep, it would be where *we* can't get at it, either, wouldn't it? It would be on the ground floor, and there's no way to the ground floor because the floor of the Great Hall has gone, and so have the staircases from it down to the basement. There's nothing left where you could possibly find a well."

"Finish your tea, then, and let's join the others. It's getting chilly in here."

"Right. I wonder whether you'd mind if I just strolled over to the farm for a word with the Carters? I expect they'll be pleased to see me. People always are."

He's *awful!*' said Laura, when Hamish, having given a promise to be back before dark, had left them. Gavin laughed. Then he said,

"Now tell me all that's been happening."

Laura and Dame Beatrice, supplementing one another, did so. Then Laura said,

"I can't let him go into the undercroft of the keep after what's happened there, but it would just about make his day if I showed him the priest's hole. What do you think?"

"Go ahead. I see no objection. But he's certain to want to know where the ramped passage leads. You could take him as far as the end of it, I suppose. Anyway, it will have to be tomorrow, not today."

"No, I shan't take him farther than the priest's hole. I wish we could find out how to get the pantry door open on to that passage from the flanking tower. Eustace knew how to do it."

"And Cyril did not," said Dame Beatrice. "In any case, these things have but the merest shred of academic interest for us now. As for the treasure, old Mrs. Carter is probably right. It was found and dissipated in about the third quarter of the nineteenth century, I think, and I very much doubt whether its intrinsic value was very great. I fancy that the shares were apportioned as indicated, and that old Mrs. Carter (Charlotte, nicknamed Charity) received the double share willed to her, and a portion of that which was willed to the sisters who died young."

"Then I can't see why Eustace was murdered."

"I thought we realised that, after due cogitation, he must have confronted Cyril with the truth about Mr. Thomas's death. Eustace was always a resolute fellow, with no regard for consequences. His war record proves that."

"And what was Cyril doing in and around the priest's hole when we caught him out?"

"I think he intended to murder the vicar. He had ascertained, I have no doubt, that he worked here in the

evenings."

"*What?*"

"I told the vicar to have a care. Mrs. Dysey was very hard up, and to sell the benefice would have afforded her some relief. What Mr. Cyril did not know was that the mechanism of the trap-door no longer functions fully, so that there is now no means of egress into the dining-room; neither had he allowed for our picketing the bolt-hole into the flanking tower."

"And why was Thomas in flannels when he was killed?"

"It must have been stipulated, in the note of assignation which he received, that he was to be so clad so that the party of the other part would recognise him in the darkness of the keep."

"The note having been sent by Cyril or Etta, of course, but purporting to come from whom?"

"From Mrs. Dysey's foolish little second cousin, Peggy Wick, presumably. There had already been one amorous interlude, you remember."

"So those two little so-and-so girls simply stayed in their bedroom playing their transistor set that night, and, her suspicions of Tom proving correct, Etta helped to murder him. She waited a jolly long time to make sure."

"Yes, she waited for more than twenty years. I fancy she heard Time's wingéd chariot, you know. She was past forty years of age and was desperate to live with Cyril. I imagine that she had often urged Cyril to kill her husband, and at last he agreed to do it. The theory, I think, was, first, that the death was accidental. If that did not work, then that Thomas, upon realising that Peggy was going to have a baby, had committed suicide. Unfortunately for her, the doctors were able to show that most of his injuries had been caused after death had taken place."

"Why didn't they leave the body in the keep, where it had fallen?"

“That would hardly have looked like an accident. A verdict of Accidental Death would have suited them very much better, obviously, than anything else.”

On the following day Laura said to her son,

“You remember your ghost?”

“Oh, rather, yes, mamma! Nobody believes in him, though.”

“Would you like to see how he managed to disappear? He was real, incidentally—possibly somebody who lived in the castle and didn’t want to leave when Mrs. Dysey let it, so he used to sneak in and steal our food and generally hang about the place.”

“*Wizard!* Do you mean there’s a secret panel in the dining-room?”

“Not only that, but a real, genuine priest’s hole.”

Hamish looked at her with great admiration.

“And *you* discovered this?” he asked her, awe-stricken by her genius.

“Well, no, I’m afraid not,” Laura admitted. “Jonathan discovered it. He was investigating your ghost story, and hit upon the thing, you see. I’m sorry it wasn’t me, but, better still, in a way it was you. Congratulations!”

“Never mind, mamma,” said Hamish handsomely. He glanced at his father. “I think you are a very companionable woman, and I’m very sorry it wasn’t you who found it.”

“Chivalry can go no further,” said Dame Beatrice.

## About the Author



Gladys Mitchell was born in the village of Cowley, Oxford, in April 1901. She was educated at the Rothschild School in Brentford, the Green School in Isleworth, and at Goldsmiths and University Colleges in London. For many years Miss Mitchell taught history and English, swimming, and games. She retired from this work in 1950 but became so bored without the constant stimulus and irritation of teaching that she accepted a post at the Matthew Arnold School in Staines, where she taught English and history, wrote the annual school play, and coached hurdling. She was a member of the Detection Club, the PEN, the Middlesex Education Society, and the British Olympic Association. Her

father's family are Scots, and a Scottish influence has appeared in some of her books.